

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

For this column, I am pleased to present the work of guest columnist, Ron Pulkrabek, aka ‘the Koniska Kid’ and honorary mayor of Koniska, Minnesota.

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS KONISKA, MINNESOTA?

The Village of Koniska is located on the banks of the Crow River halfway between Silver Lake and Glencoe. It was incorporated in 1858 with blocks and streets laid out on an official map and several blocks set aside for manufacturing purposes. The Pulkrabeks have owned 32 lots in the village for over 120 years and haven’t sold a single lot. The real estate business is somewhat slow!



Koniska sounds like a Czech name but is actually an Indian name, although mostly Czechs settled here. According to an old newspaper article, four Czech men settled on claims in the area in about 1856. They built shanties a few rods apart at their respective corners. One day an Indian Chief came by and asked “where are your squaws”? They said they did not have any squaws. The Indian Chief replied, “Oh, you are koniska”, which means “bachelor” in the Indian language and by which the locality has been named ever since. In 1857 another article stated, “Ladies needed at Glencoe for 52 men.” A reporter from Henderson traveled around McLeod County and discovered fifty-two men and only one married woman living in and near Koniska. He wrote, “Would not this point make a good opening for a lot of unmarried ladies?” “Believe

me, they would go like hot cakes, and to come down to a fact, I do not think that lovely women could find better husbands than those men would make around Koniska.” He further states, “We must by, [hook or crook] import marriageable girls into this area. Almost every farm you see is occupied by a man that should have a wife.” “They are willing to get them, but cannot spend the time to go East to hunt up such articles.”

The following articles on Koniska were extracted from local papers:

May 15, 1858: Koniska is a new town which has recently sprung up. The town has good water power, which is owned by Mr. Spencer, and he is now busily engaged in building a saw and grist mill. It is bound to be a place of good deal of movement. A 100 foot long by 10 foot high earthen dam was built. The mill pond will eventually fill up with water and a controlled gating system will feed rushing water across a water wheel to operate the mill.

November 6, 1858: The new mills at Koniska will be ready in about three weeks. The water power at Koniska is destined to cause that place to grow. Capital always seeks investment around good water power.

January 1, 1859: We learn today that these valuable mills are to be inaugurated today and a number of prominent citizens will be present. This is the first water mill put into operation west of the Minnetonka Mills, with the exception of Kingston. We need more mills in McLeod County. Where are our capitalists?

July 16, 1859: We are pleased to learn that these mills, throughout the high water, have been in operation every day. This proves that the dam across the Crow River is permanent and the mills will run year around.

November 26, 1859: We have received from the proprietors of the Koniska Mills, a sample of meal ground which cannot be surpassed. Mr. Baker their millwright is the best workman in the state.

September 15, 1860: Koniska Mills announces that they can manufacture as good a white flour as any in the state. They take the following tolls: wheat 1/8th; corn 1/7th.

May 6, 1870: Henry Abbott drowns in the Crow River. His hat was found ½ mile downstream. His body was found 6 days later. There may be some unanswered questions.

May 19, 1870: The wife of John Abbott of Koniska presented her husband with twins. Abbott is the father of twenty-four children, twenty-two by his first wife and two by his second wife. Mr. Abbott is 66 years old and his wife is 22.

April 24, 1873: The grist mill now rests against the bridge some 20 rods from its old site. Most of the machinery was removed before it went off. The Young brothers have been trying for the last seven years to keep the mill operating but almost every year some part of the dam needs work. They will head to Two Rivers to start over. For all the money they spent they might as well have thrown their money into the Crow River from the start.

May 19, 1879: “DAM GONE” states the headlines. Due to high water during the spring, swirling water destroyed the apron and dug a deep hole under the dam. It appeared OK in the evening but the following morning much destruction had taken place. A temporary dam will be put in place. The old dam cost over \$2,000 dollars three years ago.

September 23, 1880: Fred Ludwig of Koniska has his new grist mill in first rate working order

and is turning out a fine grade of flour. Fred has a pretty good knowledge of the milling business, and solemnly avows that no man shall go away from his mill dissatisfied.

KONISKA TODAY

The dam can still be seen from the new bridge on County Road 11, although somewhat covered by small trees. After the mill was abandoned, the 5 inch diameter by 10 foot long water wheel shaft was used for a granary step for 100 years. It is now at the McLeod County Museum. The picturesque old Koniska Bridge, by-passed by the new bridge in 1969, built at the turn of the last century, stands in the background like a silent sentinel over the trickle stream in the summer and flooded conditions in the spring. During the 1965 flood the road was closed briefly and the bridge was completely surrounded by water. The 100 year old concrete abutments are as strong as the day they were put in. Unfortunately the wooden floor has been burned in several places by vandals with little success. The state of the art bridge covering a 100 foot span must have been built very strong to carry heavy, gigantic steam and gas threshing tractors. I'm sure the tractor driver held his breath while crossing; it vibrated a bit but never gave an inch. It is on the McLeod County Historical Site list. The Koniska Bridge was a general meeting place for many years. The old timers say many a romance started on-or under this bridge. If you look closely, you may still find some love notes from years ago.

Eventually the railroad came through Glencoe and also Silver Lake leaving Koniska stranded. Its biggest business was a creamery, [a skimming station] in which the cream was taken out of the milk and shipped to Glencoe. The farmers would take the skim milk back home and feed it to hogs and calves. The creamery closed in 1941.

Koniska has a population of one right now in 2010. Only one house remains and the creamery burned down in 1974. It had been used as a chicken coop, a pallet factory and then a car repair business. Families who lived in the house since 1930 were Hansons, then Karstens, then Pulkrabeks, then Reimers, and now Posusta. The only real lasting part of Koniska is the Koniska Cemetery where 87 Czech souls lay resting peacefully. That will be another story.

Ron Pulkrabek February 6, 2010

Mluvíte Český? Do You Speak Czech?

kde je Koniska? ('K-de YE ko-NIS-ka') – Where is Koniska?

bakalářské ('BAK-a-larzh-skeh') - bachelor

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

Are you ready to contribute your article? 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. Thanks! Tony Kadlec