

**Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec**

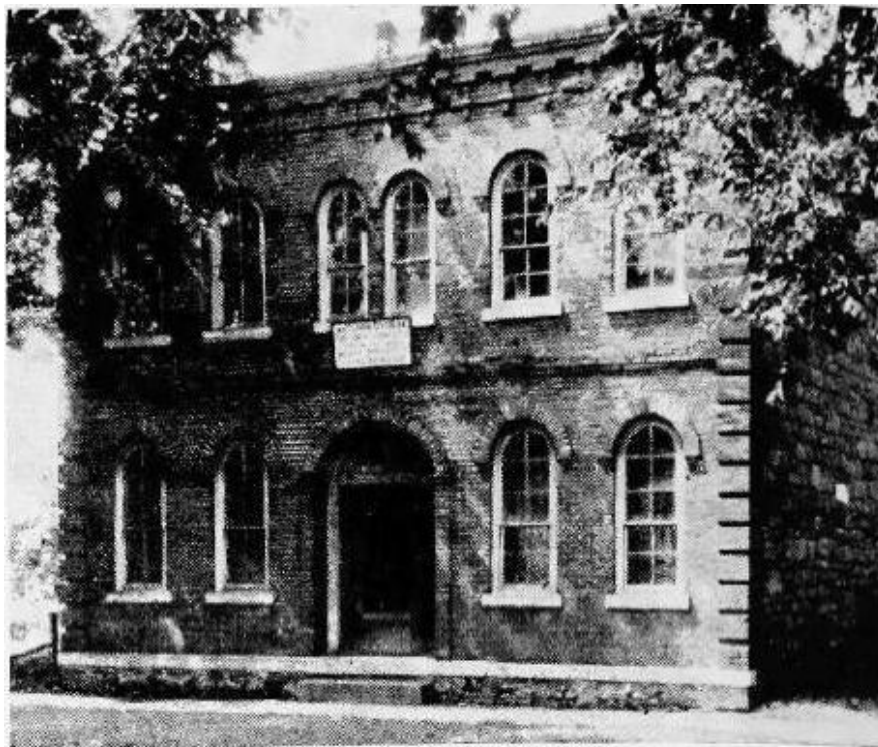
**When Minnehaha Falls Inspired Dvorak Part 3 of 4**

By Lionel B. Davis and Kenneth Carley

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MEANWHILE, Dvorak missed his four children back in Bohemia. When the question of a summer vacation came up, Kovarik suggested that Dvorak send for the youngsters and take the whole family to Spillville [Iowa]. Playing the role of a one-man chamber of commerce, Kovarik pointed out that Dvorak would be able to converse in his native tongue with practically all of Spillville's three hundred people. He could relax in a rural atmosphere, play Czech card games, and quaff his favorite Bohemian beer. Dvorak at last became "sold" on the idea, but not before he got Kovarik to draw a map of Spillville and indicate on it the location of houses and what each person did for a living.

The four Dvorak children, summoned by their father, crossed the Atlantic as charges of a sister of Mrs. Dvorak and a nursemaid. They arrived in New York on May 31, [1893] and five days later the Dvorak party of eleven, including Kovarik, detrained at Calmar, Iowa, the nearest station, for a short ride to Spillville. There the Dvoraks rented a two story brick house that stands as a Dvorak museum.



*The Dvořáks lived in this house in Spillville. It still stands as a Dvořák shrine and the home of the Bílý clock museum.*

Dvorak was at once delighted with Spillville and became a popular figure in town. He soon was playing the organ for masses at St. Wenceslaus, chatting in Czech with residents, and strolling along the Turkey River. He also walked around the countryside to listen to birds and "the wind in the prairie grasses."

St. Paul violinist John F. Rily, who has played at the Minnesota State Fair for twenty-six years, was a boy of twelve and living on a farm a half mile from Spillville when Dvorak was there. A nephew and pupil of Jan Kovarik (and cousin of Josef), Rily remembers going swimming in his farm creek with the two Dvorak boys, Antonin, ten, and Otakar, eight, and recalls seeing the composer on some of his bird-watching walks. The Spillville youngsters "were afraid of him with his wiry whiskers and sharp eyes." Rily, who later lived with the Kovarik family in New Prague, Minnesota, has also said he never will forget how Dvorak opened up all the stops while playing the church organ. The boy was in a good spot to hear because he helped pump the organ on a few occasions when the composer practiced.

The most important fact about Dvorak's Spillville stay was that he found it congenial for composing. During his Iowa vacation he wrote two well-regarded chamber works for strings — the "*American Quartet in F Major*, opus 96, and the *Quintet in E Flat Major*, opus 97. Musicians detect a Midwestern flavor in both, and the quintet has passages inspired by Indian dances the composer witnessed in Spillville. Dvorak could not wait for public performances of these compositions, so he enlisted members of the Kovarik family, including Jan and Josef, to join him in playing them in private for the first time. Neither composition is easy to sight-read. "We just had to swim through to the end as best we could," Josef Kovarik recalled.

Before finally leaving Spillville, Dvorak took two side trips in which thousands of midwestern Czechs apart from those in Iowa revealed their great esteem for the Bohemian composer and his music. One jaunt was to Chicago, where Dvorak conducted some of his own works in a concert at the Columbian Exposition on "Czech Day," August 12, 1893. "There was a great ovation at the conclusion," wrote Josef Kovarik, who — inevitably — had accompanied the composer to Chicago. After the concert Dvorak went to his favorite Austrian restaurant at the fair and was greeted by a great crowd of people. Among them was a Moravian priest, the Reverend Jan Rynda, from the parish of St. Stanislaus in St. Paul.

Father Rynda invited the composer to visit him in St. Paul, and Dvorak replied that he found it impossible to decline an invitation from a Moravian (Moravians had a reputation for geniality). Besides, he had always wanted to visit Minnehaha Falls.

**Next Week: Dvorak travels to the Twin Cities to visit Minnehaha Falls and the C.S.P.S. Hall in St. Paul...**

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