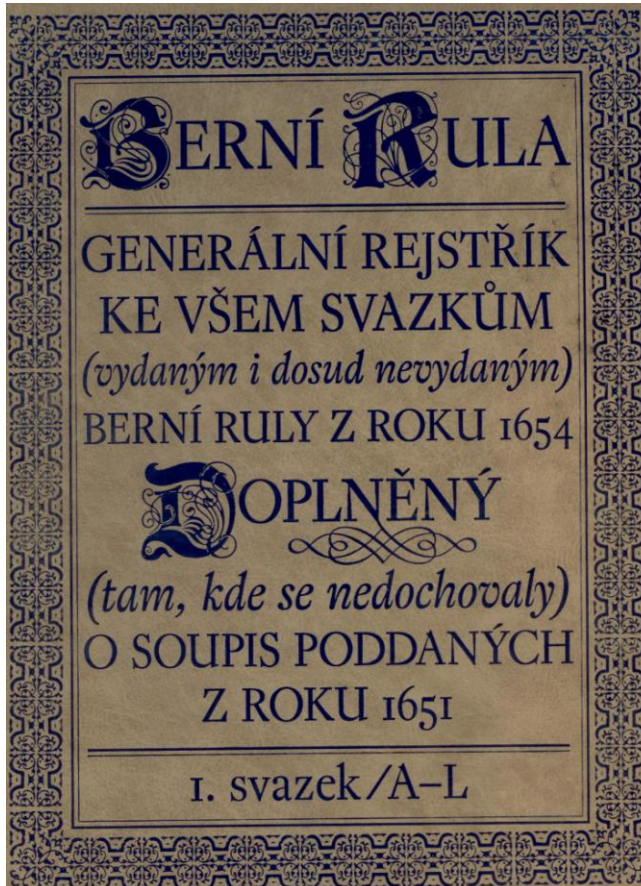


Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

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.

Czech Archive Records – Part V: 1654 Berní rula

By Gene Aksamit



The very first Bohemian tax cadaster was prepared in 1654 and was called the Berní rula (Roll of Assessment.) The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) had a devastating effect on Bohemia. The large loss of population led to significant numbers of deserted houses and farms throughout Bohemia. The Habsburg Monarchy, victor of the war, was eager to determine who was left to pay taxes! Thus, the main purpose of the 1654 Berní rula tax cadaster was to provide a listing of property and its valuation as a basis for future taxes. It is of interest to genealogical researchers because it provides a data base of 183,319 surnames from 1654 – one of them may well be your ancestor!

Information collected for the Berní rula included¹:

- Name of taxpayer
- How many fields the taxpayer owned
- How much land the farmer sowed in autumn and spring
- How many deserted fields and houses in each town and village
- Names of newly settled farmers (between 1651-1653)
- Burned down villages, burnt out farmers
- Occupations of taxpayers
- Listing of livestock for each taxpayer
- Social status (sedlák, chalupník or zahradník)
- Quality of land related to productivity – rich, medium or poor

Note that this tax cadaster identified the social status of each taxpayer. Bohemian subjects were generally placed into one of the three main social strata in the country¹: the sedlák or “full peasant farmer” was at the top; the chalupník or smallholder was in the middle; and the zahradník or “cottager” was at the bottom. Tradesmen, e.g. blacksmiths, were frequently in the chalupník category as they typically owned a few acres of land in addition to their shop. On the other hand, a cottager usually had no land but owned a few animals (maybe just a cow) and lived from his wages as a laborer.

A more detailed discussion of the Berní rula records appears in the reference listed at the bottom of the page.

So where do you find the Berní rula records if you are interested in looking for an ancestor? First, you must have traced your family back to at least the late 1600s and know their village and region as many names, and even village names, are identical. The Berní rula only covered Bohemia which was divided into 19 regions in 1654. The original records are housed in the Czech National Archive in Prague. In the 1950s the archive began to publish the Berní rula records with a separate volume for each region. Unfortunately, after seven volumes the Czech government halted publication and it has not been resumed. However, in 2003 an index for all Berní rula volumes was published. Surnames are listed alphabetically, along with the associated region and village, making this index very useful.

CGSI has the above index and the seven Berní rula volumes. The CGSI website at www.cgsi.org explains how you can request research. Also, all of these volumes will be available for use at the upcoming CGSI Symposium at the Nebraska Union in Lincoln on April 30-May1, 2010.

¹*Bohemia after the Thirty Years War: Historical Sources Deposited in the National Archives in Prague*, Lenka Matušíková and Sheilagh Ogilvie, Naše rodina, March 2006

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