

THE TRANSITION OF A NEW-WORLD BOHEMIA¹

In the years immediately following the unsuccessful revolution of 1848, the Czechs were finding life in their native land under Austrian rule more and more unbearable. They were irked by political oppression, the economic status of the majority was deplorable, many chafed under the requirements imposed by military service and under the religious intolerance of the government. After the Hussite wars of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the defeated remnants of Hus's followers were driven into the mountainous districts of Bohemia and Moravia.² They might have been forced to submit to the Austrian rule of church and state if the Reformation under Luther had not again aroused them to a consciousness of their religious status. For more than a hundred years all their political and religious activities took place in secret under unremitting persecution. At the beginning of the fifties of the last century, after the hopes of the Czechs had once more been shattered, the United States immigration agents found fertile soil for propaganda among the members of the dissatisfied sects of Hussites and Moravian Brethren.

Wisconsin was then making strenuous efforts to attract settlers from northern and central Europe. Thousands of Germans were immigrating to the vicinity of Milwaukee, which became known as the German Athens. There they were joined by large groups of Protestant Czechs, who felt

¹A paper read at the afternoon session of the eighty-fifth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society, held in the Historical Building, St. Paul, on January 8, 1934. *Ed.*

²Robert I. Kutak, *The Story of a Bohemian-American Village*, 9 (Louisville, 1933); *Průvodce po českých katolických osadách v arcidiecesi St. Paulské*, 189 (Chicago, 1910). Unless otherwise indicated, all works cited in this paper may be found in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

a religious sympathy for the German Lutherans and were familiar with the German language. Many of the Czechs selected the towns of Racine or Caledonia on Lake Michigan as their first destination upon their arrival in the United States. For several years they led a hand-to-mouth existence. The report of free land farther west lured them on. On April 1, 1858, a little more than a month before Minnesota became a state, Václav Kašpar, Josef Maly, and Antonín Navratil left Racine with their families for McLeod County, Minnesota.³ On the journey ox teams were used to convey the children and the most necessary household goods. The few roads were so poor that the caravan preferred to use the prairie beside them. Not until July 6 did the settlers reach their destination, and then only after experiencing many dangers and hardships.

The homesteads that the Czech immigrants chose were in a thickly wooded area situated about five miles east of Hutchinson and ten miles north of Glencoe.⁴ Their first task was to clear enough land for gardens in order to raise their food supply. The rest of the land was cleared gradually. Jan Kašpar, a fourteen-year-old boy at the time that his father's family arrived in McLeod County, tells of their bitter poverty during the first years. Several times the elder Kašpar walked the fifty-five miles to Minneapolis to seek employment and earn enough money to supply the most urgent needs of his family. Meanwhile the others toiled early and late, clearing the land and planting and harvesting what crops there were.

³ "Ze zkušeností starších osadníků českých v Americe" in *Amerikán: národní kalendář*, 1891, 188. This Czech-American almanac is published at Chicago.

⁴ Records of the claims made by the earliest Czech settlers in McLeod County are to be found in the "Register of Declaratory Statements filed in the Land Office at Minneapolis," 1855-1860, nos. 7705, 7706, 7707, 8153, 8154, 8218, and 8219. This volume is among the archives of the Minneapolis Land Office in the custody of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Glencoe and Hutchinson had been settled in 1855, but as trading places they were unimportant. Trips had to be made, usually by ox team, through forty miles of almost pathless forests to Carver, for there the nearest flour mill was located, and there the Czech settlers took their grain to be ground. They followed the beds of streams with wagons wherever possible, but they often found it necessary to unload and carry their produce through the woods and over swampy places. Because of danger from the Indians the settlers went heavily armed and sought protection in numbers.

In 1859 the three Czech families already living in McLeod County were joined by those of Josef Vosmek, Josef Zicha, Antonín Nunvař, and Jan Vaňous, all acquaintances from Caledonia, where they had resided for several years after their arrival from Bohemia. Other settlers followed, taking homesteads close by in the present township of Rich Valley. In the first town election in 1859 thirteen votes were cast.⁵

During the Sioux uprising of 1862 the village of Hutchinson was partly destroyed and several persons met death at the hands of the Indians. The Czech families, now fourteen in number, were compelled to seek safety in an improvised stockade which they had built for themselves.⁶ Within it they placed their personal property and live stock. All the men and boys were armed and the stockade was carefully guarded. The Indians kept circling it just out of gunshot, but hesitated to attack; and since the settlers were cautious also, they escaped with their lives. Most of their crops that year were left standing. Only the fields

⁵ *Amerikán*, 1891, 188. Six Czech families are listed in the manuscript population schedule of the census for Rich Valley Township, McLeod County, 1860, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

⁶ William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 2: 163 (St. Paul, 1924); *Amerikán*, 1891, 189.

nearest the stockade were harvested, and those by men with guns at their sides.

Jan Kašpar, among others, was drafted into service as a scout. The scouting parties consisted of groups of five or nine young men, well acquainted with the surrounding country. Their duties consisted of tracking the Indians, watching their movements, and warning the settlers whenever they were in danger. Their days and nights were filled with peril and discomfort, but they soon became as skillful in wood and nature craft as the Indians themselves. After the Indian troubles were over, the settlers were able to devote their time to cultivating the land. They increased rapidly in number, as they were followed by many fellow countrymen from eastern Wisconsin.

Many of the settlers who arrived in the community between 1870 and 1880 came directly from Bohemia and Moravia. Most of them were from such border towns as Polička, Litomyšl, Chocẽ, Nové Město, and Telecí. Only a few were from southern Bohemia.⁷ As was the case with other foreign settlements, immigrants were generally attracted to localities that already were settled by a number of people of their own nationality. Often they followed relatives or friends. It is difficult to ascertain what part letters written by settlers to friends and kinsmen in the homeland played in inducing others to emigrate. That such letters were influential is indicated by the fact that relatives and acquaintances did join many of the earlier emigrants. Some used methods of their own in deciding where to settle. At least one of the pioneers of the McLeod County community applied to a steamship company in Bremen for information and help in making arrangements.⁸

⁷ *Průvodce po českých katolických osadách*, 190.

⁸ A group of fourteen letters relating to the arrangements made by Jan Jeřábek for transporting a group of Czech families from Moravia to America is in the Jeřábek Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. See Karesch and Stotský to Jeřábek, May 2, 1873,

Late arrivals in the settlement were unable to obtain claims of government land such as were taken by the first Czech settlers, so they purchased farms from the original Yankee homesteaders, many of whom were ready for other ventures on land farther west. The community was from the beginning, and still is, primarily agricultural.

By 1874 a few houses had been built beside Silver Lake, from which the village later took its name. It was first known as Fremont. Theodore Mimms, originally of Kentucky, built and operated a general store and a sawmill there. In 1881 he sold his property to John Mimms, Jan Jeřábek, and Jan Totušek, who coöperated in laying out a town site. Together they conducted the mercantile business for three years, at the end of which time Mimms sold his share to the other two, who continued in partnership for three years more. After that they divided the stock and Totušek started a store of his own at the east end of the village.⁹ Not until 1889 was a petition presented to the county commissioners to incorporate the village. An election was held in November of that year. The village is not listed in the 1890 census. Since then its population has increased slowly—321 in 1900, 382 in 1910, 475 in 1920, and 477 in 1930.

The first churches in the McLeod County community were outgrowths of cemetery associations organized for the separate burial of the dead. In 1867 the Catholic Czechs established a cemetery at Bear Creek, four miles south of the present site of Silver Lake. Seven years later, in 1874, a Catholic church was built, chiefly through the interest of the Vosmek, Zicha, Josef Kučera, and Josef Popelka families. Anton Borovec to Jeřábek, December 17, 1873; Jan Nunvař to Jeřábek, April 1, 24, 29, 1874.

⁹ *Silver Lake Leader*, December 30, 1922; Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, *History of McLeod County*, 433 (Chicago, 1917). Silver Lake appears as Fremont in the manuscript population schedule of the McLeod County census for 1860.

lies. At first missionary priests served the parish. In 1879, with the help of the Czechs, the Poles, who settled in the community in large numbers after 1870, erected a church in what is today the village of Silver Lake. From 1880 to 1894 Polish priests served the Bear Creek church.¹⁰ In 1894 the Reverend František Jiránek, a Bohemian priest in charge of the Polish church, took steps toward organizing a Czech congregation in the village. The county and church records name him and Archbishop Ireland, Louis E. Caillet, Josef Popelka, and František Navratil as founders of the Church of St. Joseph on April 6, 1895. The Reverend Jaroslav Čermák assumed charge of the parish at Christmas, 1895. Under his leadership the congregation built a church in the following year, and later a parsonage. Few of his parishioners lived in the village proper, most of them going to church a distance of two to nine miles or more. Father Čermák served from 1895 to 1906, when he exchanged pastorates with the Reverend František Tichý of New Prague. The latter was elevated to the rank of domestic prelate with title of monsignor in 1913 and he ministered to the parish till his death in 1925. A new parish house was built in 1925 and a parochial school, costing \$35,000, was erected five years later.¹¹

The McLeod County settlement has a larger proportion of Protestants than is usual in Bohemian colonies. Many of these people are descendants of the Moravian Brethren.¹² As early as 1871 the Protestants began meeting at

¹⁰ *Průvodce po českých katolických osadách*, 194.

¹¹ Jan Habenicht, *Dějiny čechův amerických*, 401 (St. Louis, 1910); *Silver Lake Leader*, June 14, 1930.

¹² Roman Catholicism was the state religion in Austria and was forced upon the Bohemians from the time of the defeat of the Hussites at White Mountain in 1620 until the World War. Protestantism was nearly stamped out in Bohemia. Hundreds of Hus's adherents went into permanent exile or were forced into the mountain fastnesses, where they became the forebears of the Moravian Brethren. For information about this sect, see *Briève & fidèle exposition de l'origine, de la doctrine, des constitutions, usages et ceremonies ecclesiastiques . . . des Frères de*

various homes for worship. As they were unable to obtain the services of a minister for several years, they had to rely upon volunteers from their own number to read sermons and lead the singing and prayer. The first minister to preach to them was the Reverend Fridrich Emty, a German, who visited Silver Lake in 1874 and spoke through an interpreter.¹³ The people were not satisfied, however; they wanted a pastor who could speak to them in their own language. Eventually their desire was satisfied through the ministrations of the Reverend František Kún, a missionary pastor from Western, Iowa, whose influence upon the Protestant Czechs of the Middle West was outstanding.

There was at that time a dearth of Protestant Czech ministers. Because of continued persecution of Protestants in Bohemia, ministers of that faith had almost entirely disappeared there, and the few Protestant parishes that existed after the Act of Tolerance of 1781 were compelled to seek their religious leaders in Hungary. As the Czechs had fought for religious freedom in central Europe for centuries, the Hungarian Protestants had a kindly feeling toward them and for many years furnished them with ministers from their own ranks. Kún was a descendant of Hungarian pastors living in Moravia, where he was born in 1825. After obtaining a good classical and theological

Bohême & de Moravie ([Amsterdam?], 1758). A resumé of the religious situation in Bohemia is given in Will S. Monroe, *Bohemia and the Czechs*, 210-232 (Boston, 1918). Immigrants in the nineteenth century were prone to drop religious affiliations upon arriving in the United States, particularly if they settled in the cities. Those living in rural sections more often adhered to the religious faith into which they had been born, as was the case with the settlers at Silver Lake. For a discussion of these tendencies, see Edward A. Steiner, "The Bohemian in America," in *The Outlook*, 73: 968-972 (April 25, 1903).

¹³ Vilém Šiller, Václav Průcha, and R. M. De Castello, compilers, *Památník českých evanjelických církví ve Spojených Státech*, 121 (Chicago, 1900). A copy of this book is in the possession of the writer. See also *Naše Práce*, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 5 (December, 1926). This publication is the official organ of the Czech Central West Presbytery and Evangelical Union.

education, he was ordained into the ministry in 1849. He completed six years of service as vicar at Miroslava, and then emigrated in 1856 to the United States, where he settled on a farm in Tama County, Iowa. For three and a half years he cultivated the soil, enduring the hardships of the pioneer in a sparsely settled region. The first time Kún conducted religious services in the Iowa community, he faced a congregation of Czech, German, and American neighbors in the shade of a clump of trees. After 1859 he was frequently invited to preach. He spoke in Czech, German, or English, as the occasion demanded; sometimes he preached in the open air; at times he walked as many as sixty miles to reach his congregation. In 1860, at the earnest behest of six Protestant Czech families living at Western, near Ely, Kún settled among them and became their minister at a salary of sixty dollars a year. To support his family, he farmed during the day, spending his evenings in the preparation of his sermons. In 1867, when the number of Czech families in the community had increased considerably, they built their own church. In addition to his pastoral duties, Kún served for two years as professor of classical languages and literature at Western College. In 1874, with the help of a Methodist minister, P. H. Fairall, he began the publication of a periodical, *Hlas Pravdy*. A little later he published *Věstník*, "a periodical devoted to the Evangelical people of Czech language in the United States of North America." Both publications were soon suspended because of financial difficulties. Their purpose was to counteract the influence of older Czech-American periodicals of atheistic tendencies.¹⁴

¹⁴ Šiller, Průcha, and De Castello, *Památník českých evanjelických církví*, 20, 116; Josef F. Kún, *Věrný služebník: životopis a některá kázání zesnulého Důst. P. Františka Kúna, faráře Ev. Ref. Církvě u Western, Iowa, U. S. A.*, 5-12 (Cedar Rapids, 1895). A copy of the latter book is owned by the Reverend Francis Pokorny of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

By 1874 Protestant Czechs living in widely scattered communities in Iowa, Minnesota, Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas were calling upon Kún for his services. He visited each community annually, administering the sacraments; performing the rites of baptism, marriage, and confirmation; urging the people to build churches; and preparing the way for congregations with ministers of their own. Ten churches in these states were eventually dedicated by him.¹⁵

Kún visited the Silver Lake community in January, 1876, and, at the home of Totušek, preached to the assembled Protestants for the first time in Bohemian. He baptized many children, administered the rites of confirmation to several adults, and consecrated the cemetery, which had been in use since 1873. Through his influence, on February 20 of the same year, the Czech Evangelical Reformed Church was organized. The members decided to hold Sunday services at the homes of Totušek and Josef Havliš in alternate months. In the following July, fourteen acres of land were purchased from Josef Kašťánek for \$425 in what is now the village of Silver Lake. Several years were required to pay off the debt, for there was dissension among the members of the congregation and many of them were facing economic difficulties as a result of the grasshopper invasion of 1877. In the meantime a Sunday school was organized and carried on under the leadership of Totušek and later of Jeřábek.¹⁶

A church building was begun in 1881. It was dedicated on June 19 by Kún, then making one of his annual visits to Silver Lake. During the rest of the year the church work was divided and carried on regularly by the members of the congregation. The need for a regular pastor became more and more urgent and in 1884 an unsuccessful attempt was

¹⁵ Kún, *Věrný služebník*, 10.

¹⁶ Šiller, Průcha, and De Castello, *Památník českých evangelických církví*, 120-122.

made to obtain one from a missionary institute in Switzerland, where several Czech students were being prepared for the ministry. In 1887 the Reverend Henry A. Schauffler of Cleveland, Ohio, at the church's request, sent Jan Průcha, a student in the Slavic division of the theological seminary at Oberlin College, to Silver Lake. He conducted services from August 12 to October 14, after which he took charge of the Czech Congregational parish in St. Paul and visited Silver Lake every fourth Sunday. In 1889 he left Minnesota and for a time thereafter the Silver Lake church was served by various visiting pastors and theological students.¹⁷

Dissension arose among members over the choice of a minister. A minority favored the calling of Průcha, but he was rejected at a meeting held on June 16, 1891, and a short time later the Reverend František Pokorný, who was just completing his studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York, was elected. He accepted the call and was installed in the autumn. This was the occasion for the last visit to Silver Lake of the beloved Pastor Kún, who died two years later. A manse was built in 1892 and the church prospered.

Those who favored the calling of Průcha decided to separate and organize their own church. In the spring of 1891 they met at the home of Josef Dvořák for a Sunday morning service. Twelve hundred dollars was pledged, Dvořák donated a lot, and a committee was elected to consider the problem of building a church. A congregation was organized as the Free Reformed Church with fifty-seven members. In the fall, a church was built; and Průcha was called as its pastor and ordained. Since he had not completed his seminary work, he asked leave to return to Oberlin for that purpose. The Reverend Filip Reitinger,

¹⁷ Šiller, Průcha, and De Castello, *Památník českých evanjelických církví*, 123.

who was elected to substitute for Průcha, became the permanent pastor when the latter accepted a position in Cleveland.

In 1892 František Kořista donated land for a cemetery and the church bought a site for a parsonage, which was erected for \$1,100. Of this amount \$250 was raised by the members of the church, and a like amount was borrowed from the Congregational Building Society. The Congregational Home Missionary Society was asked for help in paying the pastor's salary. By 1899 the debts had been paid and the church had a hundred members. Until 1898 it had no official connection with any denomination, but in that year it sent a delegate to the Congregational conference and asked for entrance. The request was granted. During eight months of the year the pastor conducted a school each Saturday morning for training children in religion and teaching them the Czech language. There was Bible study weekly for the adults. In 1900 the church raised \$1,107, of which \$530 was for its own work and \$577 for missions. Both Protestant congregations have erected new church buildings—the Evangelical Reformed Church, whose minister is affiliated with the Presbyterian Synod, in 1905; and the Congregational Church, in 1909.¹⁸ These churches have played an important part in the life of the Silver Lake community. At one time they furnished practically the only social contacts for many farmers and their families, giving them an opportunity to visit with one another after church services and other meetings.

Until 1893 the only educational facilities available for children of the community were the rural schools. District number 38, which had its building not far from the village limits, served the town children. It became an independent district in 1893, when a four-room schoolhouse was built on

¹⁸ Šiller, Průcha, and De Castello, *Památník českých evangelických církví*, 214–216.

the lake shore within the village. Lawrence Moriarty was the teacher of the upper grades and principal during the opening year. It remained for a woman, Mathilda V. Bailiff, principal from 1911 to 1914, to agitate for and introduce a high-school department. Until 1912 the young people of the community who wished to continue their schooling beyond the elementary grades were compelled to do so in neighboring towns. For many years a large Silver Lake contingent attended the Hutchinson High School.

The first class to graduate from the Silver Lake High School, in June, 1914, consisted of five members, all of whom had done two years' work in other schools. From 1914 to 1925 the number of high-school instructors increased from one to four, and the enrollment grew correspondingly. A large percentage of the graduates of this school and of schools in the surrounding rural sections have pursued their educations further by attending institutions of higher learning or vocational schools. The majority have selected the state university, Macalester College, or state teachers' colleges. In some ways this has been a distinct loss to the community, for few of these students have returned to the town to make their homes. Several native sons of the community deserve special mention for intellectual achievements. Among them are the Zeleny brothers, Anthony, John, and Charles. The first two are physicists on the faculties of the University of Minnesota and Yale University, respectively; the third is a zoölogist at the University of Illinois. There is also a young theologian, Father Rudolph G. Bandas of St. Paul Seminary, who has published several books in his field.

While the high-school department of the Silver Lake school has prospered, enrollment in the elementary grades has declined steadily. In 1922 the Polish Catholic Church of St. Adalbert built a new parochial school. This is operated by the Sisters of Notre Dame and has an average

enrollment of over a hundred. The erection of a school by the Bohemian Catholic Church of St. Joseph in 1930 caused a further decrease in the public school enrollment.

The first generation of Czech settlers adhered to the language, habits, and customs of their native land, mingling but little with their neighbors of other nationalities. Their solidarity was such that men and women who came to the community fifty and sixty years ago have never been obliged to learn English in order to transact business or have social intercourse. They have had their own churches, libraries, and organizations; have read Czech newspapers; and Czech tradespeople have supplied all their material needs. With the education of the second generation in the public schools, a bilingual group has developed. Although its members have discarded many of the picturesque customs of their forebears and have adopted those of Americans, they have preserved enough Czech traditions to serve as a connecting link between their parents and the third generation, now upon the scene.

Until about 1914 the Bohemian language was in general use on the public school playground. A large number of children entered school without knowing English, and the task of the American-born teacher who was compelled to instruct a roomful of beginners was not easy. Persistent campaigns by the teachers have made the use of English fairly general, and one now rarely hears Czech spoken by the school children. It is used today chiefly by some of the older citizens and in part of the church services. Modes of dress are also changing. The kerchiefs formerly worn by women in place of hats and the large imported shawls once used instead of coats have almost disappeared.

In the early years the Silver Lake Czechs observed a large number of church holidays. The Catholics had special services on many saints' days and the Protestants kept a few, including St. Stephen's Day—December 26—and

Ascension Day. A curious custom was connected with the observance of Easter Monday. The boys, each with a whip and basket, called on the girls for the purpose of collecting colored Easter eggs. The whip was brought along to be used in case the girls proved reluctant to contribute to the collection.

Other customs have been transplanted. Until recently newly married couples were as a rule dowered with feather beds, which were in common use as bed coverings. In Bohemia the family's wealth had been computed by the number of feather beds it possessed. Many immigrants preferred to bring these treasures with them rather than other personal belongings. With the passing popularity of feather beds has gone the need for feather-stripping bees, which at one time were important as entertainments, with the singing of Czech folk songs to enliven the hours of the workers.

Like other nationalities, the Czechs have their own peculiar dishes. The best-known is a pastry called *koláče*. There are others, such as *bramborovi knedlíki*, a potato dumpling; apple *štrudl*; *fleky*, similar to noodles; *jitrnice*, a pork sausage; *jelita*, a blood sausage; two fried pastries, *tašky* and *křehutiny*; and *trpalky*. The latter is made of mashed potatoes flavored with melted butter, ground poppy seed, and sugar. The use of poppy seed is common, and one can see large beds of poppies in Silver Lake garden plots and fields every summer.

Amateur theatricals and music play a large part in the recreational life of the community. Several times each year Czech plays are produced by casts made up either of local residents or of amateur actors from the Bohemian communities of Hopkins or St. Paul. The Komensky Klub, a former Czech student organization at the University of Minnesota, frequently offered programs of plays, debates, or music at Silver Lake. For many years the village has had an amateur band that is known throughout southern

Minnesota for its concert work. Under the direction of Frank J. Kolar it attained the distinction of winning the American Legion state band tournament in 1922, and for several years it won first place in district band tournaments. The citizens of the village are intensely proud of this organization and contribute liberally in time and money toward its support. They collect voluntary subscriptions, give programs, carnivals, and sales, and assess a tax for the benefit of the band.

Other cultural activities have been carried on by various organizations. The Bohemian Reading and Educational Society, which was founded in 1876, has its own building half way between Silver Lake and Hutchinson.¹⁹ There the members hold meetings, give dances, conduct summer schools for the teaching of Czech to their children, and maintain a library of more than seven hundred volumes in Czech in the fields of history, politics, literature, and philosophy. Sokol gymnastic club meetings were also held there from 1924 to 1928. This club has been suspended because of lack of interest among the younger members.²⁰ The Presbyterian church has a library of some five hundred volumes, about half of which are in Czech. Several lodges, a commercial club, branches of the Red Cross, American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, and organizations connected with the various churches play a part in the social life of the community and the promotion of its many civic enterprises. Boy Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, Girl Scouts, and a Parent-Teacher Association have been active at different times. For several seasons the community supported Chautauqua and lyceum courses. Since 1920 it has held an annual community fair.

During the World War the people of the settlement, along with other Bohemian groups in the United States,

¹⁹ Habenicht, *Dějiny českův amerických*, 414.

²⁰ *Silver Lake Leader*, July 14, 1928.

worked actively for the independence of their native land. As early as July, 1915, when the Protestants celebrated the five-hundredth anniversary of the martyrdom of John Hus, hopes for the freedom of Bohemia were expressed. In 1917 several meetings were held to promote the work of such agitators as Vojta Beneš, who delivered a lecture at Silver Lake in July, and Lieutenant Antonín Holy of the Czechoslovak army. The latter spoke there in August, 1918. In October, 1917, a branch of the Bohemian National Alliance was organized at Silver Lake, a telegram was sent to President Wilson indorsing the break of the United States with Austria-Hungary, and \$2,266 was collected to help to establish the new republic of Czechoslovakia. Dr. Josef Křenek, a pastor of the Silver Lake Presbyterian church, spoke in many Czech communities of the Middle West on behalf of the movement. For this service the Czechoslovak government, through its consul in St. Paul, awarded Křenek a medal in 1928.

The material progress of the village has kept pace with that of other towns of its size. The *Silver Lake Leader* has been published weekly since 1901 under the editorship of W. O. Merrill. A village hall was built in 1909 at a cost of \$10,800. The same year an electric power plant was installed by the Silver Lake Milling Company. This was taken over by the Northern States Power Company in 1916. Five thousand dollars in bonds was voted for an addition to the public school building and a park site was purchased for \$1,600 in 1912. The same year saw the installment of a telephone exchange.

From 1887 to 1915 Silver Lake received its only railway service from a branch line of the Great Northern Railroad, which had a station nearly two miles from the village. The situation was much improved by the building of the Electric Short Line, now the Minnesota Western, in 1915. In the following year a water works system was completed. A

band stand was built in the park in 1921 and \$50,000 in bonds was voted for a new public school building. In 1923 the building of the Short Cut Trail from Minneapolis improved highway communication. The American Legion purchased an addition to the park in 1928 and presented it to the village.

The last two generations have seen many changes in the Bohemian settlement of McLeod County. As in other immigrant colonies, the ways of the Old World have given place to those of the New in nearly all the ordinary routine of living. Fifteen years ago a homesick young Czech who was studying the methods of the Young Men's Christian Association in Minneapolis could still allude to Silver Lake after a brief visit as "little Prague." But with the gradual disappearance of the pioneer settlers little remains to distinguish it from other small villages and farming districts of southeastern Minnesota.

ESTHER JERABEK

MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).