

HISTORY OF CANADIAN COUNTY OKLAHOMA

Canadian County History Book Association, Inc.
El Reno, Oklahoma

Christmas program, someone noticed smoke to the northwest. A freezing wind, changing to the north, blew the fire across the very dry prairie. The folks rushed home, and with buckets of water and wet feed sacks, fought the fire. By the time the fire was stopped, the wind had frozen the wet feed sacks. Fortunately, no lives were lost.

When Geary was founded in 1898, the church was moved into town.

In the 1900 Census of Canadian County, 26 residents listed Russia as their birthplace. A map showing the foreign-born population of Oklahoma in 1910 shows only five Russian-born Germans in Canadian County. Other members of this ethnic group had evidently been born after the group left Russia.

Czechoslovakians

Oklahoma was the last place in America to which large numbers of Czechs migrated in search of farmland. As with all Oklahoma settlers in general, most Czechs began their lives in the new land on homesteads and relinquishments.

The Czechs have been persistent in seeking to preserve their old world culture. Unlike many immigrants from other countries, who came alone, the Czechs brought their families with them, and had a tendency to create ethnic colonies.

The largest settlement of Czechs in Canadian County was around Yukon, extending to Mustang. There were a few Czech families around Union City and south of Okarche.

In the 1900 Census, 155 residents of Canadian County gave Bohemia as their birthplace, and eight said they had been born in Moravia. These two geographic regions made up the area occupied by the Czech cultural group. For the most part, migration of Czechs was completed by statehood in 1907. In 1910, Canadian County had a Czech-born population of 196. Of course, there was a much larger population of residents with Czech ancestry.



Girl in Czech costume.

Shortly after 1889, a large number of Czechoslovakians were employed as machinists in the repair shop of the Rock Island Railroad. There were a few professional and business men, such as harness makers, butchers, and blacksmiths, but most of the settlers were farmers.

The Czechs' attitude toward the land was reverent. They wanted to conserve and nurture the land rather than assault and abandon it. Because they had become accustomed to a scarcity of land in Europe, they were conditioned to the necessity for conservation and self-sufficiency. The Czechs were known for their well-kept farms.

They were careful in other areas of life as well. Their social life was full and they saw that their children received an education. They had more money in the bank than the average farmer. In other words, they were a hard-working, stable, self-sufficient people.

A Czech landmark in the Yukon area is Czech Hall (earlier called the Bohemian Hall), located on Czech Hall Road (or Cornwell Road) south of Yukon. The first small building was erected in 1901 to house two lodges, the Sokol Lodge and the Western Fraternal Life Association. Meetings of the two lodges were held there as well as gymnastics activities and dances.

Dances began to be held regularly by May 3, 1925 at the Bohemian Hall.

On display at Czech Hall are memorabilia and the history of the hall.

British

Immigration from England to America came in waves, beginning in colonial days. The Scottish people began to come to America about 1650, but a greater influx started in the early 1700's. Irish immigrants began to come in significant numbers in the seventeenth century.

Many of the Irish were actually Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. The Scottish Presbyterians migrated to Northern Ireland, mixed with the Irish, and then came to the United States in waves. Many of the Irish and Scotch-Irish came by way of Canada, because they could obtain cheaper fares that way.

Many immigrants from the lowlands of Scotland settled in New York and Virginia, and later moved west.

Some British immigrants who originally came to the frontier areas of Pennsylvania and colonies to the south intermarried with the Indian tribes they encountered. They did this because there was a shortage of white women and because inter-marriage made it easier to do business with the Indian tribes.

Some early British immigrants came as indentured servants. Many early Irish immigrants came because of religious discrimination. By 1850, most immigrants came because of changing economic conditions in Britain.

The Irish often came because of poverty at home, especially during the Great Potato Famine in 1845. The English came because the consolidation of land and widespread industrialization reduced the number of available jobs and made it increasingly difficult to earn a living in England. Many Scottish people came in order to own land, such a thing being impossible at that time in Scotland. The Welsh were also attracted by the large amounts of cheap land here.

Housing additions have proliferated, mostly along the south and the east. During the 1960's Oklahoma City annexed Yukon-area property in all directions and practically surrounded the town. Yukon promptly annexed what was left.

Water and sewer problems have persisted. Although police and fire departments have expanded greatly and use many modern techniques, more expansion is needed. The school system too, has been forced to expand. Yukon has become a suburban "bedroom city," with great numbers of citizens working in areas which do not provide taxes for Yukon. This situation has made it difficult to provide all the necessary services. The school system has had to have bond issues approved every year or two to provide sufficient class rooms, teachers and facilities for the great increase in school enrollment.

Yukon: 1891-1989

While Yukon has expanded from a tiny, crude village into a metropolitan-type town, it has retained much of the friendliness and charm of a small town. It is a fine place to live.

YUKON, CZECH CAPITAL OF OKLAHOMA

American Sokol Organization; Lodge Karel Havlicek

by Alma Stejskal

The Czech immigrants came to America to find a better life. They brought with them the belief of Dr. Miroslav Tyrš that to have a healthy, sound body and mind, exercise was necessary. In Czechoslovakia Dr. Tyrš founded the organization, "SOKOL," which means a falcon, a graceful bird that flies high

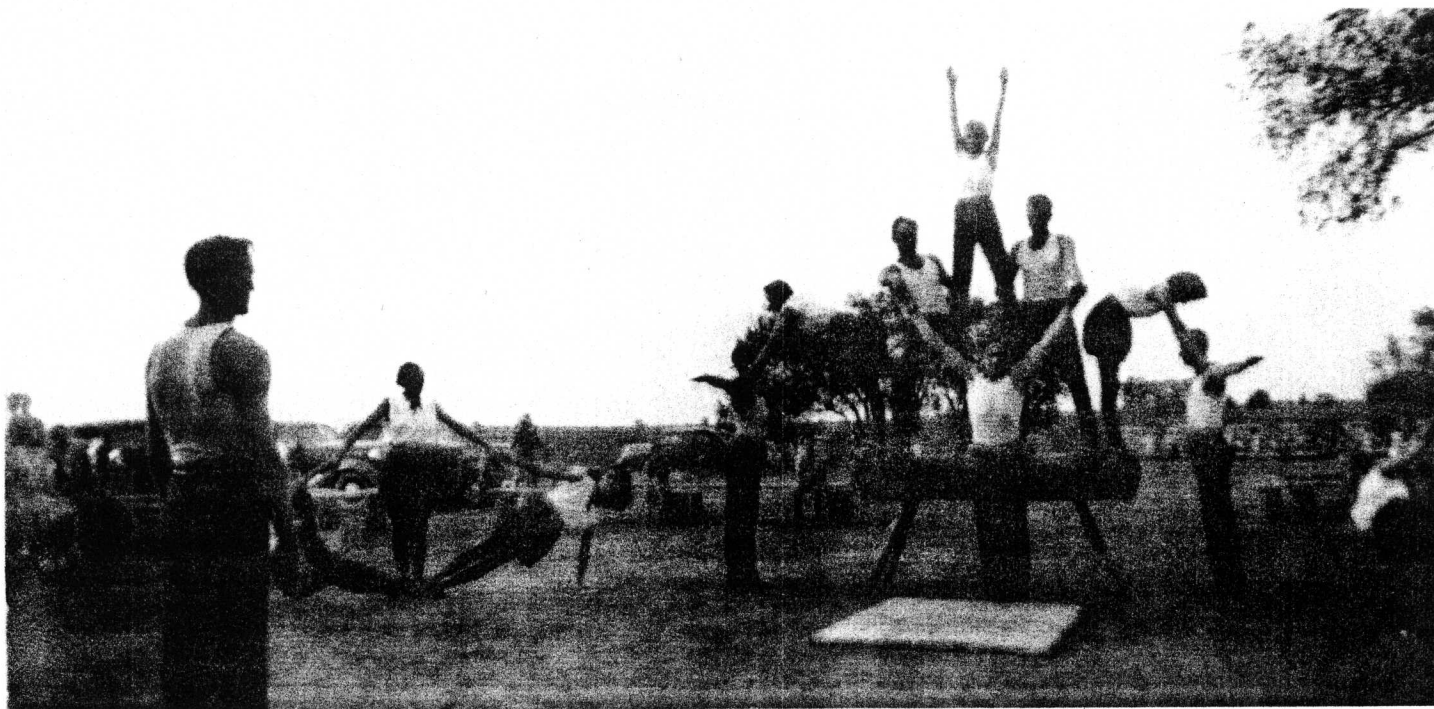
and free, the symbol of freedom. He developed a systematic method of exercise that taught gymnastics. In Sokol, the gymnast improves his health, strength, dexterity, and general flexibility. Tyrš' philosophy was that in life, not everyone can be first, but all can try to be better than yesterday.

The first unit was formed in the United States in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1865. Its many branches spread over the United States. The Czechs in the Yukon area formed a unit in 1894 and called it Lodge Karel Havlicek, named after a famous General in Czech history. The meetings at first were held in the Bruza Hall in Yukon. Dues were 25¢. First officers were: August Kastl, President; Anton Semrad, Vice-President; Frank Stejskal, Secretary; Karl Semerad, Instructor; Vencel Dolezal, Treasurer; Anton Kastl, Drill Instructor; K. Svanda, Assistant Drill Instructor. In 1900, together with the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association Lodge No. 67, they built a building in which they could hold meetings and family recreation. It was called "Bohemian Hall." In 1922, women were allowed to join and take part in the organization.

In the past, traveling instructors would spend several weeks with each unit teaching them routines, staying in homes of the families. All units were taught the same routines and they would attend Slets (contests). The Karel Havlicek Unit attended many Slets in and out of the state. They drilled in unison with Caldwell and Wilson, Kansas; St. Louis, Missouri; Omaha, Nebraska; Chicago, Illinois at Soldier's field in 1947; Corpus Christi, and Dallas, Texas.

In 1925, a larger building was built. Later it was called "Yukon Czech Hall." The ceiling has a recessed portion where gymnastic rings were hung, and there are four anchor plates imbedded in the floor to hold a horizontal bar used for special exercises.

A commemorative stamp was issued by the United States Postal Department February 15, 1965, honoring the Centennial of Sokol in America. Lodge Karel Havlicek in Yukon is the only active Sokol lodge in the state of Oklahoma.



Sokol members with Albert Stejskal, instructor, 1940.

Lodge Jan Zizka No. 67

by Milly Krivanek

Lodge Jan Zizka was organized July 24, 1899, in the yard at Karel Bruza's Yukon home. Subsequent meetings were held in homes of various members.

First Officers:

1. President, Vaclav Santin
2. Vice President, Jan Kouba
3. Secretary, August Kassel
4. Overseer, Jan Brezina
5. Treasurer, Pavel Kouba
6. Guards, Marie Benes and Karel Cerny
7. Guide, Petr Jelinek
8. Trustees, Emma Kassl and Amalie Tolacko

On October 2, 1900, a charter of incorporation was granted by the Territory of Oklahoma to the lodge, designating it as a non-profit fraternal order. It is a unit of "Zapadni Ceska Bratska Jednota," which was started in 1897 in Iowa. Translated the name means "Western Bohemian Fraternal Association." In 1971, the name was changed to "Western Fraternal Life Association."

In 1901, two acres of land 2 1/2 miles south of Yukon were given to the order by Vaclav Slavik. This is a part of the SE/4 Sec. 32-T12N-R5W. On it the first small hall was built. (See Yukon Czech Hall Story).

The Lodge has sponsored many activities such as Czech plays brought over from the Old Country and presented here by local talent. Many adults owe their knowledge of reading and writing the Czech language to the schools which were held over a span of two decades beginning in 1918. The Saturday night dances have been a fixture from the early twenties to the present. Polkas, waltzes, two-step and others are played by local and out of state bands. These dances are open to all. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, Friday night western dances drew large crowds. In 1945, it was voted that meetings be con-

ducted in the English language. In 1954, two additional acres of land were purchased from Ella Jelinek Subera.

The Lodge donates to several charitable organizations and to the maintenance fund of Yukon, Mustang, Frisco and Czech National cemeteries. The Yukon FFA and 4-H Clubs are benefited also.

Flowers are sent to last rites of deceased members. A ham is donated and members bring food to the bereaved family. Czech Hall may be used to serve the meal if the family desires.

Cards are sent to the ill. A children's Christmas party is held each year. In May a dinner is served honoring fathers and mothers. Recognition is given 50-year members. Appreciation plaques are awarded many members in recognition of their years of service devoted to fraternal activities.

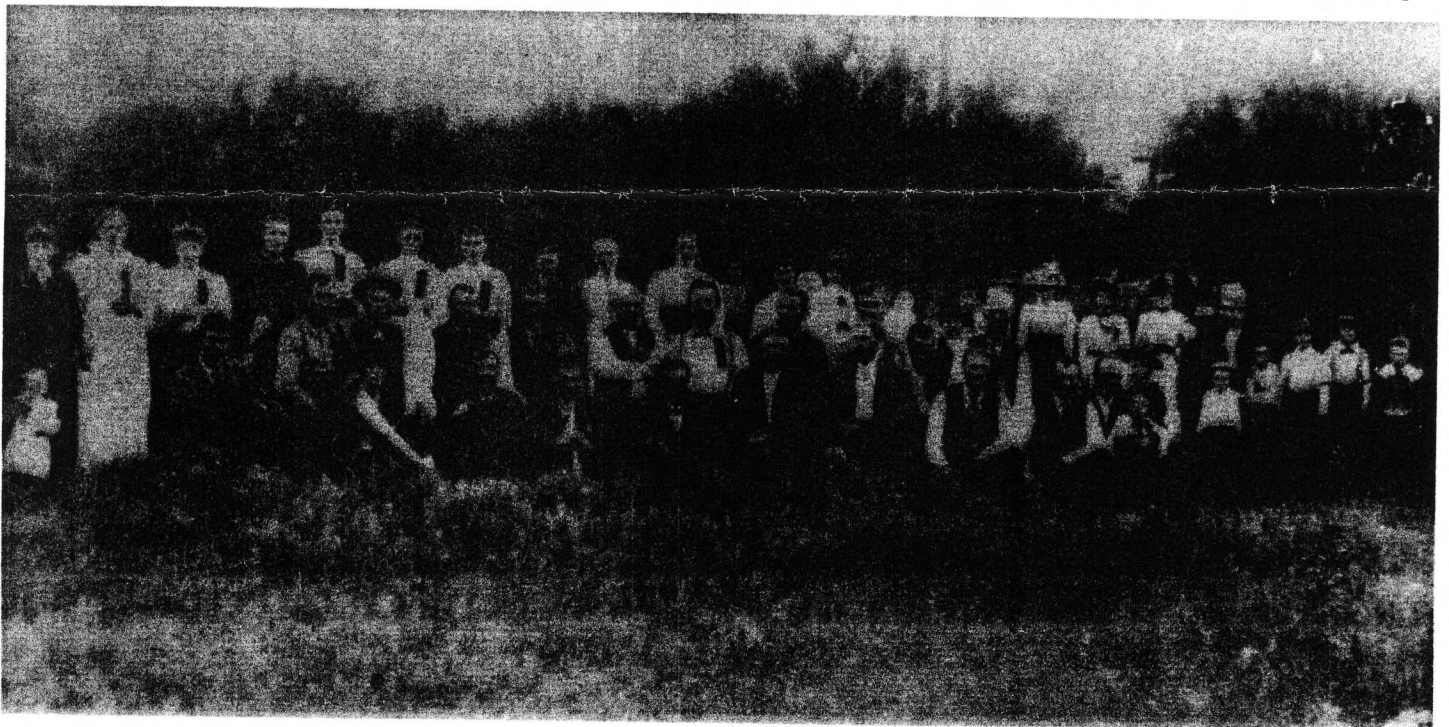
In 1985, the Lodge received a Gold Star award made possible by fulfilling certain obligations designated by the home office in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A queen candidate is sponsored each year in the Oklahoma Czech Festival Pageant.

Lodge meetings are held the third Sunday of each month. Membership is now 415 with \$1,664,401.00 of insurance in force. The lodge represents an 89 year old mutual aid society which now sells annuities also. It is a strong link with an old world culture. Oklahomans of Czech extraction are thoroughly Americanized, but Lodge Jan Zizka, in the activities it sponsors, is recognized as a vehicle for preserving the Czech Heritage.

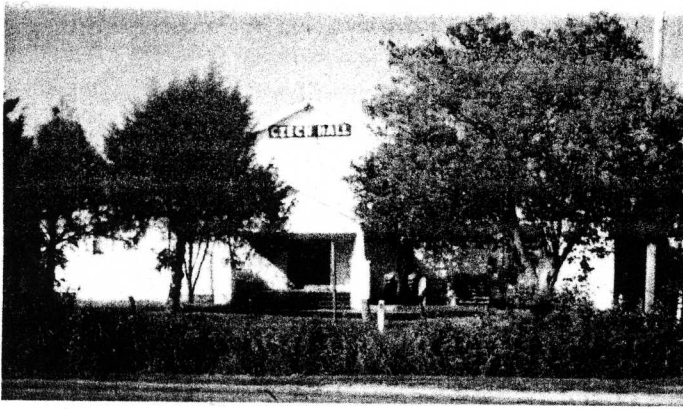
Yukon Czech Hall History

by Milly Krivanek

In 1901 a small hall was built 2 1/2 miles south of Yukon. It was the meeting place of "Zapadni Ceska Bratska Jednota" and "T. J. Sokol" lodges, two Czech groups. It remained until 1924, when it was torn down and the present hall, with much volunteer labor and the combined effort of members of both lodges,



Charter members of Lodge Jan Zizka no. 67 on July 24, 1899, the day of their organization.



Yukon Czech Hall, 1986.

was built. Some of the timbers from the first hall were used in the new building as were some of the member-made benches. The grand opening was held on May 3, 1925. Each hall was called "Bohemian Hall."

The new hall measured 40 x 80 feet with a raised stage and a partial basement. The original hand painted canvas drops for the stage are still in existence.

The first addition was built on the north in 1935. In 1939 the kitchen was modernized, a ladies lounge, and modern rest rooms added. In 1945, the name "Czech Hall" came into common usage. In 1954, another addition was built the length of the hall on the south side. In 1957, a new kitchen was built along with two storage areas. The old kitchen was converted into a social area. The last addition was a storage area on the west side. The wood and coal burning stoves were replaced with propane heaters. Air conditioning units were installed in 1976. In 1981, a new roof covered the building. There are now, in addition to the dance floor, two sections, 20 x 80 feet, for seating. A caretaker's home is on the property.

Throughout the years the hall has been a focal point of Czech social and musical functions in Oklahoma. It's a traditional gathering place for weddings, family reunions, and receptions. In addition, many non-Czech organizations choose to have their parties there. A church group, until they could build their own facility, had their Sunday worship in the hall. It is also the voting place of Precinct 224 and the home of the Saturday night dances. At the beginning of World War II, there was discussion, for a time, of closing the hall. Soon, however, the need for recreation was recognized. The dances continued with service personnel admitted free. The proximity of important military bases spread the fame of Czech Hall beyond the Yukon area. Visitors to the dances came from such far away places as Guam, San Francisco, Hawaii, and France. In the early 1980's two orchestras from Czechoslovakia played at the hall. These were "Moravanka" and "Mistrenanka." People from many parts of Oklahoma and surrounding states came to dance and listen.

The section line road in front of the building, from N.W. 10th Street to the South Canadian River, is officially named "Czech Hall Road."

In 1980, Yukon Czech Hall was named a Historic Site by the Oklahoma Historical Society and at that time was placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of the Interior.

The Czech Festival Story

by John Onderek

The Czech Festival had its beginning in October 1966, when the Czech lodges of Yukon Czech Hall sponsored a festival to celebrate the city of Yukon's 75th anniversary. The theme for this first Czech Festival was "Vitame Vas" (We Welcome You) and "Sousedska" (Get Together). Oklahoma Czechs, Incorporated was formed to administer the affairs of an annual festival to be held on the first Saturday in October.

Yukon was officially proclaimed the CZECH CAPITAL OF OKLAHOMA by the Governor of Oklahoma, Henry Bellmon. The goal and purpose of the Czech Festival is the preservation and sharing of the old Czech customs along with providing a part of the traditional Czech foods.

The official beginning of the festival is the parade down Main Street at 10:00 A. M. This parade features the parade units of the Shrine Temple, the Queen, Prince, and Princess contestants, bands, Czech dancers, floats, and many other business, civic, and youth groups.

Following the parade, the festivities shift to the Oklahoma Czech Building located on 5th Street, one block north of Main Street. Entertainment is provided throughout the day at the bandstand with polka bands playing polkas and waltzes for dancing and listening pleasure.

The parade awards are announced along with the crowning of the Czech Queen, Prince, and Princess. Folk dancers, youths, and adults, in colorful costumes perform the Beseda, the Czech National Dance, along with other folk dances. Also performing are individuals and groups from various parts of the country.

Inside the Czech building, traditional foods (kolaches, klobasy, homemade breads and pastries) are sold throughout the day. Also available are Czech records and tapes, Czech dolls, Czech cookbooks, handmade souvenirs, and imported Czech merchandise.

Outside the Czech Building, the Czech Festival Crafts Show is held throughout the day. This show, sponsored by the Oklahoma Czechs, Incorporated, is rated one of the top craft shows in the state of Oklahoma. Craftsmen from all over the state and the southwestern United States display and sell their handwork.

The day concludes with dancing at the Czech Queen Coronation Ball in the Czech Hall.

YUKON BECOMES FAMOUS WITH GRADY, THE COW

by Ernest Berousek
Sue Kilmer

Yukon was a little town in 1949. Probably very few people knew about it outside of Canadian County and Oklahoma. But, in February of that year, the town of Yukon made headlines across the United States, because it was the home town of a cow with an interesting problem!

"Grady," a Hereford cow weighing 1400 solid pounds, had