The ALABAMA REVIEW

A Quarterly Journal of Alabama History

VOL. 74 **APRIL 2021** NO. 2

Published by the

ALABAMA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

in cooperation with

THE UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

The Alabama Review (ISSN 0002-4341) is published quarterly, in January, April, July, and October, by the Alabama Historical Association. Annual membership dues are $15.00 for students, $40.00 for individuals, $50.00 for families, and $65.00 for institutions. Add $20.00 per year for international postage. Membership applications should be mailed to Membership Secretary, The Alabama Historical Association, c/o Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts & Humanities, Pebble Hill, Auburn, Alabama, 36849.

Subscription agents, retailers, and article authors desiring information on availability and discounts should contact the Editor, *The Alabama Review*, University of Mobile, 5735 College Parkway, Mobile, Alabama, 36613. The *Review*'s telephone number is (251) 442-2588, email address is alabamareview@umobile.edu, and the web address is www.alabamahistory.net. Single issues are $15.00 each; for orders of five or more, issues are $10.00 each. Issues are available through the editorial office; make remittances payable to the Alabama Historical Association.

The Alabama Review is printed and manufactured by The Sheridan Press, Hanover, Pennsylvania. Periodicals postage paid at Mobile, Alabama, and Hanover, Pennsylvania.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Secretary, The Alabama Historical Association, c/o Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts & Humanities, Pebble Hill, Auburn, Alabama, 36849.

THE ALABAMA REVIEW

VOLUME 74 APRIL 2021 NUMBER 2

Published by the ALABAMA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

ISSN 0002–4341

Do Not Forget Me: Czech Settlers in Baldwin County, 1900-1940

MELDA BOYD

On February 5, 1922, an ad appeared in the Czech-language farm journal *Hospodář*, published in Omaha, Nebraska (see Image 1). It was an invitation to immigrants from Czechoslovakia, living in the United States, to come to Baldwin County, Alabama, to begin a new life of prosperity. The ad read:

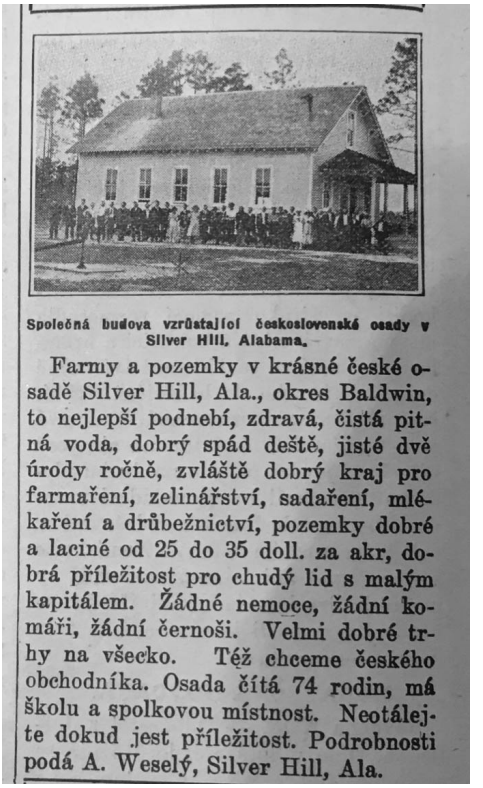
> Farms and lots in the beautiful Czech settlement of Silver Hill, Ala., Baldwin County, the best climate, healthy, clean water, good rainfall, certainty of two harvests per year, an exceptionally good area for farming, growing vegetables, fruit trees, dairy and poultry farming, good and inexpensive lots from 25 to 35 dollars per acre, good opportunity for poor people with little capital. No diseases, no mosquitos, no blacks. Very good markets for everything. Also seeking a Czech shopkeeper. The settlement has 74 families, a school and a communal building. Don't delay while you have the opportunity. Details available from A. Weselý, Silver Hill, Ala.[1]

The "communal building" shown in the ad is known today as the "Little Bohemian Hall," a historic structure now located in the heart

MELDA BOYD is retired from federal government service in Washington, D.C. She served as chair of the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI) from 2019 to 2020. Her articles about Baldwin County and its Czech heritage have appeared in *Naše rodina* and *The Longleaf Leader*.

[1] *Hospodář*, Feb 5, 1922, p 80. English translations by Irena Kavalek, unless otherwise specified.

THE ALABAMA REVIEW
VOL. 74, NO. 2
APRIL 2021



Společná budova vzrůstající československé osady v Silver Hill, Alabama.

Farmy a pozemky v krásné české osadě Silver Hill, Ala., okres Baldwin, to nejlepší podnebí, zdravá, čistá pitná voda, dobrý spád deště, jisté dvě úrody ročně, zvláště dobrý kraj pro farmaření, zelinářství, sadaření, mlékaření a drůbežnictví, pozemky dobré a laciné od 25 do 35 doll. za akr, dobrá příležitost pro chudý lid s malým kapitálem. Žádné nemoce, žádní komáři, žádní černoši. Velmi dobré trhy na všecko. Též chceme českého obchodníka. Osada čítá 74 rodin, má školu a spolkovou místnost. Neotálejte dokud jest příležitost. Podrobnosti podá A. Weselý, Silver Hill, Ala.

Image 1. Ad in the Czech farm journal, *Hospodář*: "Communal building in the growing Czechoslovak settlement in Silver Hill."

of Silverhill, Alabama.[2] The photo most likely was taken in the early 1920s, when the building was located on Bohemian Hall Road and called the "Bohemian Hall"; the people standing outside the building are celebrating a wedding. This article will answer a number of questions related to the remarkable story of the Czech community reflected in this advertisement: Who built the Bohemian Hall?

[2] The town known today as "Silverhill," appears as both "Silverhill" and "Silver Hill" in old documents.

Why did Czechs come to Alabama?[3] How did they get there? What did they do when they arrived in Baldwin County? Using primary and secondary sources, oral histories, and personal papers, I hope to preserve the memory of Baldwin County's Czech colony.

The title of this article comes from a piece of embroidery that hung over my aunt Lucille Mildorf Denham's bed. The piece is pale turquoise silk, stitched with small blue forget-me-nots and the legend, "Do not forget me." My grandmother, Helen Vandas Mildorf, the daughter of Czech immigrants and a farm wife who lived on the outskirts of Robertsdale, Alabama, embroidered the piece, but she could not finish it before her death in 1939 at the age of forty-eight. It is my hope that this article will help carry out my grandmother's wish that she and her family, and the other Czech families who settled in Baldwin County in the first third of the twentieth century, not be forgotten.

Conventional wisdom among people who study Czech immigration suggests that there were no Czech settlements in Alabama. This belief likely originated with the assessment of Jan Habenicht, a Czech American who, by his own account, traveled the United States for more than twenty-five years, writing "hundreds and thousands of letters to old settlers and distinguished persons" and collecting "as much material as I could so that I might be able to save the memory of my compatriots of both good and ill will, because the Czech nationality in the United States after us will inevitably be deluged into the melting pot society."[4] Habenicht's book, *History of Czechs in America*, provides a state-by-state assessment of the dispersion of Czech

[3] The term "Czechs" as used in this article encompasses people from Bohemia and Moravia. These people speak Czech and have similar customs. Before World War I, Bohemia and Moravia were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The country Czechoslovakia was created after the war. From 1918 to 1938 Czechoslovakia was comprised of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia. Today Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia comprise the Czech Republic, or Czechia, which has separated from Slovakia. For excellent maps of the changes in the borders of the region, see Maps 12, 13, 14 and 16 by Eva Semotanová of Charles University, Prague, at the end of the book, *A History of the Czech Lands* by Jaroslav Panek, Oldrich Tuma, et al. (Prague, 2011).

[4] Jan Habenicht, *History of Czechs in America*, Miroslav Koudelka, trans. (St. Paul, MN, 2015), 3.

communities throughout the United States and is a key text for those seeking to understand Czech immigration to America.[5] Habenicht writes, of Alabama: "Czech Slavs made no colonies there, only a very small number of them have settled here and there."[6]

When Habenicht's book was first published in 1904, in Czech, his assessment was accurate; there were few Czechs in Alabama at that time. How few there were can be inferred by the fact that he notes that there were twenty-three Czech families in nearby New Orleans, Louisiana, a small number that, nevertheless, proved enough to attract specific notice.[7] It appears that no community in Alabama had even that many Czechs by 1904, and few students of Czech immigration patterns were aware of Czech population increases in Baldwin County in subsequent years.

Baldwin County's Czechs may have escaped notice in the academic community for three reasons. First, few Czechs came to Alabama directly from Bohemia or Moravia. Most began their lives somewhere else in the United States, generally in places known for having attracted significant numbers of Czech immigrants in the 1800s and early 1900s. Some of these places advertised directly in Bohemia and Moravia to attract immigrants. Second, most Czech immigrants came to Baldwin County in 1920-1921, years after Habenicht's book was published. Third, students of Czech immigration history have focused their attention on the larger Czech immigrant communities located in Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Ohio, Nebraska, and Texas. Typically, these are the communities founded in the late 1800s or early 1900s and are mentioned in such works as Habenicht's book.[8]

Ads like the one at the beginning of this article appeared in the period 1900-1930, not only in *Hospodář*, a publication widely read by Czech immigrants, but also in Czech-, Swedish- and English-language publications distributed throughout the United States. While some

[5] Dějiny Čecheˇv Amerických, first published in 1904, translated into English and republished by the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International.
[6] Habenicht, *History of Czechs in America*, 375.
[7] Habenicht, *History of Czechs in America*, 379.
[8] Habenicht, *History of Czechs in America*, 57, 141, 211, 257, 290, 382, 473.

were more elaborate in format than others, all were effusive in their praise of Baldwin County.

The opportunities to settle in Baldwin County were made possible by the convergence of a number of factors. There was plenty of uninhabited land. At approximately 1,600 square miles, Baldwin County was, and is, the largest county, geographically, in Alabama, and it had always been sparsely settled. Also, the railroad was expanding into the area to ship sawn timber and agricultural products to buyers in the northern cities, and to bring settlers, especially immigrants, south to Baldwin County. Finally, businessmen and colonizers had purchased large tracts of Baldwin County land at low prices and were eager to establish new towns on these lands.[9]

The Swedish Founding of Silverhill

SWEDISH IMMIGRANTS BEGAN COMING TO AMERICA IN LARGE NUMBERS in the mid-1840s. By 1890, some 478,000 Swedes lived in the United States, mostly in the Midwest.[10] In 1896, prompted in part by a national economic depression, a delegation of five Swedish men, led by Oscar Johnson, traveled from Chicago to Baldwin County to find a location for a Swedish colony.[11] Johnson and his compatriots bought an isolated parcel of 1,500 acres with "few roads which were practically impassable."[12] By 1906, the colony had become the town of

[9] Examples include Oscar Johnson and the Swedish colonizers of Silverhill, the German colonizers of Elberta, and the businessman who founded Foley.

[10] Dag Blanck, "Swedish Immigration to North America," Augustana College website, https://www.augustana.edu/swenson/academic/history (accessed June 2, 2020).

[11] Debbie Owen, "Silverhill History," http://sites.rootsweb.com/~alcsilve/ provides excellent accounts of Silverhill's founding by Swedish colonizers. Website accessed February 4, 2021.

[12] James P. Kaetz, "Silverhill," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3398 (accessed June 25, 2020); "Origin of Silverhill Colony," a typescript written in Swedish by Charles Norman, Sr., and translated into English by Mrs. G. Lundberg in 1952, p. 2, in Baldwin County Archives, Bay Minette, Alabama (hereafter Baldwin Archives). This information also appears in O. F. E. Winburg, "Scandinavians at Silverhill" in L. J. Newcomb Comings and Martha M. Albers, *A Brief History of Baldwin County* (Fairhope, AL, 1928), 75.

Silverhill, complete with "homes, hotels, churches, stores, post office and school, with better boat service from Fairhope to Mobile, with freight hauled from Mobile down the bay and up Fish River to Silverhill Landing, and hauled by wagon to Silverhill. The L&N [Louisville & Nashville] Railroad was being built and towns were springing up in Loxley, Robertsdale, Summerdale, Foley, Elberta and Magnolia Springs."[13]

From the early days of Silverhill, Oscar Johnson used articles and pamphlets to entice settlers from the North. One of the first was a thirty-six-page Swedish-language booklet published from 1899-1901. Entitled "Silverhill I Ord och Bild" ("Silverhill in Word and Picture"), the document is filled with photos, testimonials, and descriptions of the fertile, productive, pleasant, and inexpensive land awaiting Swedish settlers in and around Silverhill. It advertises prices of ten to fifteen dollars per acre, town lots for twenty-five and fifty dollars, ten acres suitable for fruit growing at twenty-five dollars per acre, and free transportation for anyone buying forty acres of land.[14]

Many Swedes came from the Midwest during Silverhill's early years. They worked in Baldwin County's unfamiliar territory, and they faced many challenges, including learning how to farm in a warm climate, finding reliable markets that would reward their efforts with a good income, and dealing with weather extremes, including frequent and destructive hurricanes and occasional hard freezes in winter. The Hurricane of 1906 dealt a significant blow to the settlement. Although no lives were lost, extensive damage caused some Swedish families to lose heart and move on.[15] Oscar Johnson found himself still in possession of large tracts of land. His hopes of selling these properties to settlers began to diminish as fewer and fewer Swedish

[13] Norman, "Origin of Silverhill Colony," 6-7. The Louisville & Nashville Railroad added a spur line from the railhead at Bay Minette south to the nascent town of Foley in 1905. Foley's founder, J. B. Foley, a Chicago businessman, bought some 50,000 acres of Baldwin County land in 1902 and negotiated with the L&N for the extension to his new town.

[14] Owen, "Silverhill History," http://sites.rootsweb.com/~alcsilve/bookfrontcover.jpg (accessed August 10, 2014), pp. 1, 17; Owen, "Silverhill History," http://sites.rootsweb.com/~alcsilve/silvbook1trans.html#end2 (accessed May 2020).

[15] Norman, "Origin of Silverhill Colony," 7.

families came to the area, and so he expanded his efforts to a new group of potential settlers, the Czechs.[16]

Czech Immigrants and Their Motivations

IN THE LATE 1800S AND EARLY 1900S, TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CZECH immigrants came to America. More than 95,000 Czechs arrived in the United States between 1900 and 1910 in the largest wave of Czech immigration to the United States.[17] In 1920, there were 200,000 Czechs in Chicago alone.[18] Czech immigrants to the United States came from cities and villages, especially poor villages. Driven by a variety of "push and pull" factors, most were looking for ways to improve their lot in life. They sought both economic opportunity and freedom from the stifling rules and regulations they endured in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Many young Czech men immigrated to escape military conscription; some Czechs came to escape family troubles; and a few came for the adventure of experiencing a new land, about which they had heard fantastic stories, including the potential to become wealthy "overnight." Most Czechs started their new lives in the cities or rural communities of the Midwest or Texas. They labored in American coal mines, meat-packing plants, or on farms, often performing the type of work they had done in Europe. A number of these newcomers came under contract to their future American employers.[19]

In Bohemia and Moravia, the beautiful areas surrounding towns and villages compensated to some degree for the difficulties of life. Forests, cultivated fields, and orchards spread out from the populated

[16] Phone interview with Debbie Owen, Silverhill historian and manager of Silverhill history website, August 10, 2014.
[17] Chicagoland Czech American Community Center, http://www.chicagocacc.org/the-historical-czech-chicagoland, (accessed March 17, 2020).
[18] Ibid.
[19] The mechanics of these arrangements and the role of agents located in Europe, who were affiliated with steamship lines eager for passengers and/or American companies seeking cheap labor, is described in great detail in Tara Zahra's excellent book, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration From Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York, NY, 2016).

areas. Some, especially Czech immigrants living in American cities, missed the beauty of nature. Others, especially those who became farm laborers in America, renting their farms or working as farmhands on another farmer's land, must have found the affordable "paradise" promised in the ads for Baldwin County irresistible.

The immigrants living in American cities in the North had other reasons to want to farm in the South, especially in the 1920's, the decade that saw the largest numbers of Czech immigrants relocate to Baldwin County. Following World War I, in the decade known as the "Roaring Twenties," the industrial cities boomed, and the coal mines, steel mills, copper mines, stockyards, and meat-packing plants operated with the labor of hundreds of thousands of immigrants who had come from Europe earlier in the 1900s, especially from Eastern and Central Europe, Russia, and Italy. For most in these circumstances, the work was hard and hot, dirty and dangerous.[20]

The numerous diseases of the time posed another risk to the immigrants. The polio epidemic of 1916 resulted in 27,000 cases and 6,000 deaths, including 9,000 cases and 2,343 deaths in New York City alone.[21] The disease recurred in the U.S. every summer.[22] Just two years after the 1916 polio epidemic, the Spanish Flu struck, killing some 675,000 Americans by the time it subsided in 1920.[23] Then in the years 1921-1925, America suffered a diphtheria epidemic.[24] While Americans from every sector of the country died

[20] Charles Hirschman and Elizabeth Mogford note in "Immigration and the American Industrial Revolution From 1880 to 1920" that immigrants and their children comprised more than half of manufacturing workers in 1920; if the grandchildren of immigrants are included, more than two-thirds were of recent immigrant stock. See HHS Public Access: ncbi.nim.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2760060l (accessed February 24, 2021).

[21] "Whatever Happened to Polio?," Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Behring Center, https://amhistory.si.edu/polio/timeline/index.htm (accessed March 28, 2020).

[22] Dana Robinson and Anne Battenfield, "The Worst Outbreaks in U.S. History," *Healthline*, https://www.healthline.com/health/worst-disease-outbreaks-history#1 (accessed March 28, 2020).

[23] Centers for Disease Control (CDC), "History of the 1918 Flu Pandemic," https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-commemoration/1918-pandemic-history.htm (accessed May 28, 2020).

[24] Robinson and Battenfield, "The Worst Outbreaks in U.S. History."

from these diseases, the major outbreaks were most devastating in the big cities, especially in the crowded conditions in which many of the immigrants lived.

Attracting the Czechs

IN 1908, OSCAR JOHNSON ADVERTISED FOR A LAND AGENT TO "COLONIZE the environs of Silverhill, Robertsdale, and Summerdale."[25] Karel Hanak, a Czech who had immigrated to Texas, accepted the position and attempted to establish a traditional Czech farming community in the vicinity of Silverhill. The first Czechs to arrive in the years 1909-1911 were Joseph Kulička and his family, followed by the Joseph Heidelberg family from Hazen, Arkansas; the Joseph Kus family; the F. Sinclik family; and three bachelors: Vaclav Sedlaced [sic], Albert Marik, and Anton Svoboda.[26] Hanak's model Czech farm village, called "Čechie," did not work out as he had intended and Hanak, discouraged, left Silverhill in 1912.[27] Nevertheless, the other Czechs carried on, and more Czech immigrants came to inhabit the area.

Oscar Johnson and others advertised Baldwin County land widely throughout the United States. One of the most comprehensive advertising vehicles of this period was a 105-page English-language booklet published in 1922 by P. W. Sharp in Foley, Alabama. Sharp, a self-declared lifelong publisher, used this remarkable little book to extol the benefits of life in Baldwin County and to present advertisements to help the reader connect with people who had land and merchandise

[25] A. J. Cejka, "Chapter of the history of the Bohemian Colony," two-page typescript written ca. 1927, 1. Document in possession of Rosie Heidelberg Pope, August 2014.

[26] Cejka, "Chapter of the history of the Bohemian Colony," 1. James Vlasák, the first Czech, arrived in Silverhill in 1898, years before Oscar Johnson made concerted efforts to attract Czech settlers. Little is known about him, except that he came to Silverhill in 1898, died on January 8, 1939, and is buried in the Silverhill Cemetery. See Owen, "Silverhill History" and Georgia Kučera's handwritten notes for a speech she gave at the Foley Civic Center, January 18, 1986, Baldwin County Heritage Museum, Elberta, Alabama (hereafter "Baldwin Heritage"). Vaclav Sedlaced's actual surname is likely the Czech family name "Sedlaček."

[27] Comings and Albers, *A Brief History of Baldwin County*, 80.

for sale.[28] The publication provides today's reader with a glimpse of both the enticements offered to potential Baldwin County residents and the local infrastructure of that time.

The document is entitled *Baldwin County, Alabama: Observations of a Former Minnesota Man, who lived 22 years in the Northwest States—Seeing the Wonderful Possibilities and Opportunities from a Northerner's Viewpoint.*[29] The dedication reads: "To Those Home-Loving Folks who Appreciate Beautiful Surroundings, and are Looking for an Opportunity for a Successful Career."[30] Sharp is careful to assure the reader that he is "not affiliated with any land company, or get-rich-quick scheme, or boom enterprise—we have nothing to sell." He also notes that the publication is financed by the advertisers, who have given him "carte blanche permission to publish a book of facts on Baldwin County … This book is sent you with the hope that it will enlighten you as to the unlimited possibilities of this Great County, with it's [sic] present development as well as it's [sic] thousands of acres of undeveloped lands. They only await the magic touch from you to produce wealth and prosperity—a happy home for you and your children."[31] Sharp's booklet is filled with articles, photos, and ads of all sorts, for banks and general stores, the Organic School in Fairhope, auto sales companies and grocery stores and, of course, dealers in real estate. [32] One of the people with "improved and unimproved farms and raw lands" to sell in Robertsdale and Silverhill is "Anton F. Wesley," who also appears in other ads of the period, such as those in *Hospodář*.[33]

[28] P. W. Sharp, *Baldwin County, Alabama: Observations of a Former Minnesota Man, who lived 22 years in the Northwest States—Seeing the Wonderful Possibilities and Opportunities from a Northerner's Viewpoint* (Foley, AL, 1922), "Introductory," in Baldwin Heritage.

[29] Sharp, *Baldwin County*, "Introductory," in Baldwin Heritage.

[30] Sharp, *Baldwin County*, inside front cover, in Baldwin Heritage.

[31] Sharp, *Baldwin County*, "Introductory," in Baldwin Heritage.

[32] Marietta Johnson, originally of St. Paul, Minnesota, founded the School of Organic Education, based on progressive educational principles, in Fairhope, Alabama, in 1907. See Cynthia "Maggie" Mosteller-Timbes, "Marietta Johnson School of Organic Education," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1883 (accessed February 4, 2021).

[33] Sharp, *Baldwin County*, 38, in Baldwin Heritage. Wesely was active in the Czech community, not only as a realtor but as an advisor to Czech immigrants. His name appears in

The ads, pamphlets, and fliers of the early decades of the twentieth century emphasize the same points: land in Baldwin County is plentiful and affordable, the soil is good for growing crops, the weather is mild and good for farming, the water is pure, the air is healthful and free of diseases, and the sunshine and rainfall are plentiful.[34] In short, Baldwin County is good for one's health, one's pocketbook, and one's soul. P. W. Sharp called Baldwin County, "A Land of sunshine and flowers."[35]

Jan Kotas, a Moravian immigrant, found truth in the promise of farm life in Baldwin County. In 1920, he described his reasons for immigrating to America, as well as his life in Silverhill, in an open letter published in *Hospodář*. Kotas begins by noting that he was born in 1804 in Bystřice pod Hoštýnem. He continues:

> I left my hometown after finishing high school and went to Brno where I chose business as my future profession while also attending the private German school "Rupricht Handelsschule." After three years I decided together with my parents and older brother to leave my homeland in order to escape military draft because it was becoming clear that there was something brewing. Austria was amassing its army on the southern border. The Eighth Brno Regiment was sent to the Serbian border and a decision seemed imminent.

---

documents, from ads to official papers such as applications for naturalization, in its variant spellings, including the Czech version, "Veselý" and the Anglicized version, Wesley or Weselý.

[34] "Facts for You," a pamphlet published in Chicago from 1920 to 1922 by the Svea [Swedish] Land Company, includes testimonials about Silverhill's Swedish colony, such as the following by D. W. Goodman, M.D.: "In those elevated portions of Baldwin county the death rate is so low that were it not for the natural termination of sinectitude, the population would be almost perpetual." See "Facts for You," p. 6, in Owen, "Silverhill History," http://sites.rootsweb.com/~alcsilve/brochure27a.jpg, (accessed June 1, 2020).

[35] "BALDWIN COUNTY, ALABAMA—A LAND OF SUNSHINE AND FLOWERS" appears as a "header" on most pages of Sharp's booklet. See Sharp, *Baldwin County*, in Baldwin Heritage.

Kotas continues by conveying a sense of the voyage to and his arrival in the United States. He and his family, like other Czech immigrants, did not remain in their first American home for long before heading to Baldwin County:

> After a month-long trip, which was very pleasant and jolly (there were about 25 of us young men from Bohemia and Moravia) we landed in Galveston, Texas. We stayed there for a short time at the house of our friend Křižanský and then continued our journey. The final destination was Mobile, Alabama, near the Czech settlement "Čechie" on the opposite shore of the gulf. We travelled to the settlement with our brother-in-law Vladimír Bačelka who already owned land there. We bought a partially completed farm for $1,800 and chose it as our permanent home because we liked the area and thank God we still do.

Kotas's comments demonstrate how suitable the climate and environment of Baldwin County proved for agriculture. He saw in his new home an opportunity to thrive as a farmer:

> I have visited the North a few times and every time I return home I am grateful to be back because of our climate. We have summer here almost year-round and we never have to worry about coal supplies for the winter. Our settlement was at first disparaged as having no future. Those people should come back for a visit today and see how easy it is to keep 15 or more dairy cows on a 20-acre farm and also to grow several early crops to boot. This year our cucumbers delivered about $600/acre and one could see in the faces of our countrymen how happy they were. For heavy cream one gets 60 cents for 1 pound of fat (butter), before delivery. […] I just want to add that I agree with the editor of this publication who wrote that money is not everything. If a farmer can make a decent living he should

be satisfied. Speaking for myself, I left a successful career as a warehouse supervisor in the city for a life of farming because it is a more natural way of life, in the words of our poet Svatopluk Čech:

> Let the crowd
> Bow before status and gold
> Let them worship heroes
> While I proudly grasp in my closed hand
> A simple branch[36]

Whatever the attraction for specific individuals, it is clear that the ads for Baldwin County worked.[37] In 1922, *Hospodář* carried the ad shown at the beginning of this article, with slight modifications, in at least four issues.[38] In February 1922, the ad reports that there are "74 families," presumably Czech, in Silverhill and notes that there is a position for a "Czech shopkeeper."[39] In October 1922, the same ad appears, but this time it reports that "92 Czech families" live in Silverhill and that there is a position for someone to work at a hotel. The bottom of the ad also notes that interested parties should contact A. Weselý in Silverhill.[40] The ad appears again in *Hospodář* on November 20th and December 20th of that year, and in both, the ad reports the number of Czech families in Silverhill to be 112. A. Weselý continues to be the point of contact for interested parties, and the positions of shopkeeper and hotel clerk seem to have been filled.[41]

[36] Jan Kotas, Letter from Silverhill, *Hospodář* 30, no.1 (February 1), 1920, 37.
[37] Whenever I asked Czech descendants how their family chose Baldwin County as their home, those who could recall the reasons cited a "newspaper ad" that their parents or grandparents read.
[38] These issues of *Hospodář* were made available to me courtesy of the library of the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
[39] *Hospodář*, February 5, 1922, 80.
[40] This is the same Anton Weselý who advertised real estate in P. W. Sharp's booklet. According to Weselý's grandson, Tony Wesley of Silverhill, Anton Weselý brought "the first 400 settlers," to Baldwin County by selling real estate to them. Phone interview with Tony Wesley, 2013.
[41] *Hospodář*, Nov 20, 1922, 680; and December 20, 1922, 743.

One of the best sources of data conveying the growth of Czech communities in the United States comes from the prominent Czech-American author, Thomas Čapek. Born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1861, Čapek immigrated to the United States in 1880, was naturalized in 1886, and became a writer, lawyer, and businessman. In his book on the Czechs living in America, published in 1920, Čapek estimates that there are "more than 100 people of Čech [sic] Stock" in Silverhill in 1919.[42] In a table compiled from census data, Čapek lists thirty-six states "having populations whose mother tongue is Czech;" in 1910, Alabama ranked thirty-fourth, with 184 people. Illinois was by far the most heavily populated by Czechs with 124,225, more than twice as many as each of the states that ranked second and third (Nebraska, with 50,680, and Ohio, with 50,004, resp.).[43] Unsurprisingly, many of the Czechs who came to Baldwin County originally settled in Illinois, Nebraska, or Ohio. Čapek's book includes a map showing the location of "742 centers having more than 100 people of Čech [sic] birth and descent." The only spot indicated for Alabama is Silverhill.[44]

The Czech population of Baldwin County continued to grow as more Czech immigrants came from other parts of the United States and as children were born to Czech families. The 1900 census for Silverhill shows no residents with a Czech surname; however, by 1926 many Czechs lived in the town and surrounding area. That year, the enumeration of Silverhill's citizens that was required for Silverhill's incorporation lists 288 residents living within the limits of the Silverhill municipality, of whom sixty-two, or twenty-two percent of the population, have Czech surnames.[45] In 1928, L. J. Newcomb Comings

[42] Čapek based his estimate on census data and the opinion of Anton Svoboda, "a Silverhill farmer" whom Čapek deemed "qualified to speak with authority" for the state of Alabama by "reason of [his] social or business standing or length of residence." See Thomas Čapek, *The Čechs (Bohemians) in America: A Study of Their National, Cultural, Political, Social, Economic and Religious Life* (Boston, MA, 1920).

[43] Čapek, *The Čechs (Bohemians) in America*, 60, quoting the Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, "Mother Tongue of the Foreign White Stock," Table 17, 985-986.

[44] Čapek, *The Čechs (Bohemians) in America*, "The Distribution of the Stock in the United States," sheet between pp 60 and 61.

[45] Owen, "Silverhill History," http://www.rootweb.com/~census/ (accessed May 9, 2020).

and Martha M. Albers, officers of the Baldwin County Historical Society, wrote that the "Bohemian Colony" had "about two hundred and fifty families (over one thousand persons), and some individuals are prosperous merchants and mechanics as well as farmers."[46] Czech immigrants established homes and farms throughout central Baldwin County, including Summerdale, Fairhope, Barnwell, Sonora, and Robertsdale. From the earliest days of Czech migration to Baldwin, the Czech "capital" of the county was Silverhill, with Robertsdale the Czechs' "second city."

The Swedish settlers and the Czechs who came after them found true "pioneer" conditions awaiting them, as their handwritten memoirs and typescripts and the memories they passed on to their children and grandchildren as oral history attest. The earliest settlers found nothing but earth and trees as most of Baldwin County was still in timber.[47] These stands were primarily longleaf pine, part of a vast, but already rapidly disappearing longleaf pine ecosystem, estimated by forestry historians to have covered some ninety million acres, stretching along the southern coast from the piney woods of Texas to at least the mid-Atlantic coastal plain of Virginia.[48] After the Civil War, men who had seen these woods during their service in the Union army or had heard about this forest from others came to the South, bought up large tracts of longleaf pine forest, and used the trees for their economic value.[49] They expanded the naval stores industry, extracting turpentine, tar, and resin, and they built sawmills and used the lumber in all manner of construction, including houses, barns, fences, boats, and wagons. Longleaf pine was prized; its valuable wood built the South and was shipped as sawn timber and logs to

[46] Comings and Albers, *A Brief History of Baldwin County*, 80. Comings and Albers credit A. F. Wesley and A. J. Cejka for information on the Bohemian Colony.

[47] A map by Roland M. Harper, dated 1913, lists Baldwin County as the "Southwestern pine hills." See Roland M. Harper, *Geological Survey of Alabama; Economic Botany of Alabama, Part 1, Map of Alabama showing Geographical Divisions or Forest Regions, 1913*. From the Historical Files of the United States Geological Survey, Reston, VA.

[48] Bill Finch, Beth Maynor Young, Rhett Johnson, & John C. Hall, *Longleaf, Far as the Eye Can See: A New Vision of America's Richest Forest* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012), 1, 17.

[49] Phone interview with Adlai Platt, Vice President for Operations, The Longleaf Alliance, May 9, 2020.

the North and to Europe. When a tract of timberland was exhausted or the remaining timber was too difficult to access, the lumberman or turpentine operator sold or abandoned the cutover land, often to colonizers, and moved on.[50] Railroad operators also owned large tracts of timberland, a source of land on which to lay track, as well as a supply of long-lasting longleaf pine for railroad ties and wood to fuel the early steam engines. They, too, sold excess or cutover land.[51]

The land that the settlers found in Silverhill and the surrounding area was a combination of cutover timberland; pine barrens; small stands of timber that may have been tapped for turpentine, were too large to cut easily, or were too difficult to access; and woods that had been regularly burned to improve grazing for free-range livestock and to reduce the tick population. The topography of the area, including the flat land, the gently sloping hills, the woods, and the creeks and rivers that laced the county, can be clearly seen in a map dated 1920, based on field work done in 1914. There are "burned woods" and other sections of forestland very near the center of Silverhill and Robertsdale.[52]

Whether the land the settlers bought was cutover or still had trees on it, it had to be cleared. Cutting down longleaf pines was hard, dirty, time-consuming work, given the longleaf's dense and resinous wood and the immense size of some of the trees. Typically, laborers used a crosscut saw, manned by two people, for this job. The landowners often sold any timber remaining on their property, or they had it cut up at local sawmills for their own use. A common way to remove the stumps was to burn them in place, a time-consuming task that filled

[50] An example is the Baldwin County Colonization Co., a group of German businessmen from Chicago who bought some 53,000 acres to found the German colony of Elberta. They purchased the land from The Southern States Lumber Company in 1903, later dividing it into forty-acre tracts for development. See Gulf Coast Media, Volume 125, Issue 15, 1 Section. 28 pp. (possibly dated 2016); Comings and Albers, *A Brief History of Baldwin County*, 78; and James P. Kaetz, "Elberta," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3395 (accessed June 2020).

[51] Phone interview with Adlai Platt, May 9, 2020.

[52] Progressive Military Map: Alabama-Florida; Robertsdale Quadrangle, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1920, from the Historical Files of the U.S. Geological Survey, Reston, Virginia.

the air with sooty smoke for weeks.[53] Later Czech settlers sometimes found farms with at least some cleared land and perhaps a house left by the former owner. In at least one case, a Czech family bought an entire abandoned farm, complete with a small farmhouse and crops already planted in the field.[54]

My family's story is representative of life in the early days in Baldwin County for many, if not most, of the Czech immigrants who came with dreams of starting a new and better life. My father, Fred Mildorf, was born in the Czech enclave of Phillips, Wisconsin, in 1917. His father, James, was a Czech immigrant, and his mother, Helen (née Vandas), was the daughter of Czech immigrants.[55] In his handwritten memoirs, my father described the early years of the family's life on a 160-acre farm that his father bought, near Robertsdale, in 1921:

> [P]ioneer [life] was [the] same as [in] Wis[consin]: wood burning stoves to cook and bake with and kerosene lamp for light. The weather here was better[;] no long cold winters. But in the spring time sometimes it [was] rain and more rain. The dirt road to town was muddy when the wagon and mules went by all [the] farmers.[56]

> On the farm the house was built in 1880 and there were 8 pecan trees and [a] mulberry tree, the berries were good [to] eat[,] and mother made real good mulberry pie and jelly. There were many things to do and learn to get a good start[.][57]

[53] Phone interview with Adlai Platt, May 9, 2020.

[54] In 1920, Czech settlers Alois Karel Kralik and his wife Emilie bought a functioning forty-acre farm along the southern side of what is now Fairhope Avenue, Rte. 48, just before the junction with Rte. 55. The property included a furnished house, as well as a field already planted in crops. Phone interview with Ken Kralik, grandson of Alois and Emilie, April 15, 2020.

[55] James's original name was "Vaclav"; he changed it when he came to the United States.

[56] The Mildorf family did not get electricity on their farm near Robertsdale until sometime after World War II. Phone interviews with Lucille Mildorf Denham, various dates.

[57] The two-story house, which Aunt Lucille termed "Swedish Gothic" in style, proved unsafe, so the Mildorf family tore it down and built a small two-room wooden home, typical of Czech farm houses constructed in the late 1800s and early 1900s in Czech settlements throughout America. Phone interviews with Lucille Mildorf Denham, various dates.

> One of the first thing[s] our father had to do was to buy a team of mules and a wagon, then [a] walking plow and cultivator.
>
> Land had to be cleared. The first crop planted was Cucumbers in spring 1922[.] When the Cucumber just come [sic] out of the ground[,] I had [to] chase the birds out of the field because they [would] eat the young plants. The first crop of Cucumbers after the harvest time paid off [a] real good profit[.]
>
> We planted orange tree[s] because there were some orange groves but at times we had some freezing frost that killed the trees.[58]

The settlers farmed on the cleared land, learning which crops thrived and which perished in soil types and a climate new to them. They sought markets for what they had grown and looked for the most efficient ways to get their crops to them. They battled untimely rains, hurricanes and storms, and sometimes the middlemen who bought their crops.[59] They tried planting fruit orchards (oranges, satsumas, peaches, pears) and nuts, especially pecans. Often the Czech settlers grew cucumbers, Irish potatoes, and sweet potatoes.[60]

One of the Czech farmers' most helpful allies in their efforts to succeed was the county extension agent, a partner in agricultural production since L. T. Rhodes first served in that position for two days per week in 1909.[61] Several agents served in that position in the two decades that followed. S. H. Gibbons, who served from 1927 to 1929, was particularly effective in the role; he was instrumental

[58] Fred Mildorf, "Pioneers in Early 1900," handwritten memoir, ca. late 1970s or 1980s, pp. 5-6. I have retained the original language and punctuation of my father's handwritten memoirs, out of respect for my father and to provide the reader a sense of the English writing of someone whose first language was Czech. Document in possession of author.

[59] Hurricanes struck Baldwin County in 1906, 1916, and 1926. The 1926 hurricane was particularly damaging.

[60] Phone and in-person interviews with various descendants of Czech farmers who settled in Baldwin County, various dates.

[61] E. E. Hale, "Extension Work Helps Farmers," Nov. 1930, *Baldwin Times*, Baldwin County's Pen and Pictorial Edition (Bay Minette, AL): 1.

in having Auburn University's experiment substation locate near Fairhope, one of his many accomplishments.[62]

Even more prominent was Ernest Everett (E. E.) Hale, Baldwin County's extension agent from 1930-1944. More than fifty years after Hale's departure from Baldwin County, a number of the descendants of the Czech immigrants who bought farms in the county in the 1920s still recalled the important contributions of County Extension Agent Hale.[63] Newspaper reports of the time confirm him to have been an energetic proponent of methods to diversify farm production and to improve farm productivity and profitability. He wrote a number of articles published in the local newspapers, organized "Poultry Schools," and organized and promoted events such as the stockmen's meeting in Bay Minette on April 12, 1930, at which purebred Hereford bulls from Texas were available for sale.[64] By November 1923, Hale could report that he had "travelled 22,000 miles since February 1st, doing county agency work," and that a full-time secretary kept the office open six days per week.[65] Hale's son, Dr. Ernest Everett Hale, a retired Tuscaloosa urologist, remembered that as a boy he enjoyed going with his father to meet with farmers in the various ethnic communities of Baldwin County, including the Czechs. He recalled seeing Czech immigrants, especially women, who wore clothing unlike anything he'd seen before. Hale recalled that

[62] E. E. Hale, "Extension Work Helps Farmers." The Gulf Coast Substation, established in 1930 under a 1927 act by the Alabama legislature, is one of the five original agriculture experiment substations of the Main Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station at Auburn University. Today this facility is known as the Gulf Coast Research and Extension Center, and it is still located at the site of its founding on Route 104. See pamphlet produced by Gulf Coast Substation, ca. 2000.

[63] Phone and personal interviews with a number of descendants of Czech settlers, various dates.

[64] Together, Hale and county Home Demonstration Agent Margaret Garrett conducted nine poultry schools in the year beginning on November 1, 1929, teaching farmers how to care for and manage baby chicks. See *Baldwin Times*, March 20, 1930, (Bay Minette, AL), 1. This article also found as a clipping, not sourced, in the Extension Service's *Baldwin County Annual Report, November 1, 1929-September 30, 1930*, 35, in Baldwin County Extension Service Offices, Bay Minette, AL (hereafter BCES); *Baldwin Times*, April 10, 1930 (Bay Minette, AL), 6.

[65] Hale, "Extension Work Helps Farmers," *Baldwin Times*.

when his father met with members of the county's ethnic communities, he engaged local bilingual members of each ethnic community to interpret for him.[66]

Baldwin County's Extension Service programs assisted farm families in many areas of life. Hale's colleague, Home Agent Margaret Garrett and her successors held classes in nutrition, pointing out the need to provide eggs, chicken and milk for home use. They also encouraged the consumption of whole grains, raw vegetables, and fruit, in addition to the potatoes that were a staple on farmers' tables.[67] Home agents and their teams taught women and girls how to can food safely, manufacture mattresses, make their homes more comfortable, and how to earn money selling items they made themselves, such as pine-needle baskets and embroidered and hand-sewn items.[68] The Extension Service organized local residents throughout Baldwin County, establishing 4-H clubs and Home Demonstration clubs and providing leadership training to develop community and club leaders.

It is unclear how many Czech women and children participated in these programs; the data in the reports are not categorized by ethnic group served. However, occasionally a child with a Czech name is shown and identified in photographs and newspaper clippings describing club activities. Most likely these youngsters knew enough English to participate in Extension Service programs. The annual Extension Service report for 1939 points out how diverse the county and clubs had become: "The population of Baldwin County is most unusual for Alabama, gathering its population from all over the United States and several foreign countries. At a Home Demonstration Club dinner in December of last year, twelve different states and five foreign counties [sic] were represented. Two native Alabamians were present, the agent and a club women's [sic] young daughter."[69]

[66] Phone interview with Dr. E. E. Hale, August 14, 2017; and personal interview, Dr. E. E. Hale, Tuscaloosa, AL, October 15, 2017.
[67] *Baldwin County Annual Report, For Year Beginning November 1, 1929 Ending September 30, 1930*, 6, in BCES.
[68] *Baldwin County Annual Report*, various dates, in BCES.
[69] Verna Patterson, "Narrative Report of County Home Extension Agents; Baldwin, from December, 1938 to November 30, 1939," 1, in BCES.

The Extension Service program for 1929-1930 included an "illiteracy campaign," to be conducted by local clubs established for the purpose. The report notes, "Eight Home Demonstration clubs helped by privately teaching illiterates and by helping to organize schools and get teachers."[70] Albina Rezner Keller, the daughter of Czech immigrants John and Dorothy Rezner, recalled that such a club met in the Rezner home. A woman who taught English came to the house to teach four Czech women: Mrs. Duba, Mrs. Kohoutek, Mrs. Havranek, and Mrs. Rezner. The English classes at the Rezners' stopped after just a short time, when the funding ran out.[71]

Preserving Czech Culture

AS THE CZECH SETTLERS MADE HEADWAY IN FARMING, THEY ALSO established means of mutual support and worked to maintain their culture. In the 1920s they founded a number of organizations, including the "Bedrich Smetana" singing society and its "Ladies Branch," called "Libuše," which was organized in Robertsdale in 1927 and conducted by A. J. Cejka.[72] The community also organized two popular bands, one conducted by Mr. F. Moravec, Sr., and the other by Mr. F. Novak. The community also established two fraternal lodges: the CSPS, Bohemian Slavonian Benevolent Society "Joseph Matousek, No. 210," founded in 1921, and the ZČBJ, begun in 1926 by the Western Bohemian Brotherhood Society.[73] Reflecting the agricultural pursuits of the Baldwin County settlers, residents formed two farmers associations—the Independent Growers and Shippers Association and the Hub Truckers Association (founded in 1922).[74]

[70] *Baldwin County Annual Report, For Year Beginning November 1, 1929 Ending September 30, 1930*, 12, in BCES.

[71] Phone interview with Albina Rezner Keller, October 2017. It is unclear from archival materials and personal interviews how successful such programs were in combatting illiteracy.

[72] Cejka, "Chapter on the history of the Bohemian Colony," 1; Comings and Albers, *A Brief History of Baldwin County*, 81.

[73] Cejka, "Chapter on the history of the Bohemian Colony," 2. Apparently John F. Novak is meant.

[74] Comings and Albers, *A Brief History of Baldwin County*, 81.

The growing Czech population and the demand by community organizations for space to gather prompted the settlers to establish two community centers. In 1920, the Czechs built the Bohemian Hall on an acre of land southwest of Silverhill that they had purchased from Anton Kulička for a dollar.[75] They donated their labor to construct the hall, and they donated the timber, which was sawn at the Heidelberg Sawmill & Planer. The Bohemian Hall served as a school for the Czech children in the area and as a meeting place for the adults. Originally sited on Bohemian Hall Road, the building was moved three times between its founding and the dedication of the refurbished building in 2014. Today it is located in the heart of Silverhill and is known as "The Little Bohemian Hall."[76] In 1924 the Czechs founded the Poučný a Zábavný Kroužek (PZK), the "Educational and Entertainment Circle," and built a clubhouse in nearby Robertsdale. The PZK Hall became a social center for the Czech community, a place to hold meetings, present plays in Czech, teach their children the Czech language and folk dancing, and host dances and other events. A number of people I interviewed remembered that the PZK was well-known for having the best, slickest dance floor in Baldwin County.

Baldwin County's Notable Czech Musicians

AN OLD CZECH PROVERB, "SCRATCH A CZECH AND YOU'LL FIND A musician," expresses the Czech people's deep appreciation for music. That appreciation was readily apparent in the Czech settlements of Baldwin County, both in the folk dancing and programming that occurred at the PZK clubhouse, and in the numerous musicians and musical groups that performed in the community. A number of individuals, including Anna Blaha, Georgia Kučera, John Novak, and

[75] "Silverhill 75th Anniversary," a special edition published by the *Baldwin Times*, November 11, 1971 (Bay Minette, AL); Owen, "Silverhill History," http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~alcsilve/silverhill75.html (accessed June 24, 2014).
[76] Owen, "Silverhill History," William Howard "Bill" Young, "Czech Mate; Chapter Two, The Kulicka's and Foukal's, http://sites.rootsweb.com/~alcsilve/cmchap2.html (accessed March 5, 2021).

Frank and Clara Prochazka, serve to demonstrate just how important music was as the community sought to preserve and share its Czech heritage.

Anna Blaha was born in Nýřany, in the Pilsen region of Bohemia in 1896 and there married Anton Blaha (born 1888), also from Nýřany, in 1911. The couple immigrated to the United States through the Port of Baltimore in 1912, and by 1919 they were living in Bay Village, Ohio. As of January 1, 1926, the Blahas and their four children had moved to Silverhill.[77] Anna was one of the first to teach local children the Czech dance, the Beseda.[78] One of Anna's students, Georgia Snašel Kučera, followed in her footsteps. A member of a prominent Silverhill family, Georgia went on to teach many Czech descendants the Beseda.[79] She was active in promoting appreciation for Czech culture and history, writing articles, giving newspaper interviews, and making presentations about Czech history and culture throughout the county.

Remembered by some as "the Father of Music in Baldwin County," John Novak was born in 1896, in Maribel, Wisconsin, to Czech immigrants.[80] Novak's journey to Alabama, and his life and work in Alabama and Mississippi, reflect the hardships of life in the 1920s for many who came to Alabama. They also demonstrate Novak's resilience, diligence, charity, and love of music. His father, Frank J. Novak, was born in Krasetin, Bohemia, in 1872. In 1922, John was persuaded by his aunt Mary and uncle John L. Simanek to go to

[77] Anton Blaha, Petition for Citizenship, United States of America, No. 1077, April 28, 1931. Witnessed by John Fidler and Peter Forsman, Mobile, AL, in Alabama Naturalization Records, 1909-1991, Records of the District Courts of the United States, 1685-2004, Record Group 21, National Archives and Records Administration, Southeastern Branch, Morrow, GA, via Ancestry.com (accessed July 25, 2020).

[78] The Beseda is a complex dance based on a series of traditional Czech folk dances. The Bohemian version and the Moravian version are distinct from each other.

[79] Georgia Snasel Kucera, "Immigration of Czechs, Moravians and Slovaks to America from 1850 to 1934," in *A Compendium of Ethnic Histories of Baldwin County*, compiled by Mary Elisabeth Duryea for the Baldwin Heritage Museum Association, 1987, p. 32.

[80] Elsie Katherine Fidler, "They Wait for Me," 33-page typescript, undated, p. 24. Elsie was John Novak's sister. Document in the possession of Jennifer Fidler, John Novak's great-niece.

Image 2. Czech dancers in front of PZK Hall, around 1925. Photo courtesy of Frankie Kucera, Silverhill.

Alabama; as he remembered, he was promised "the land of roses" but found "pine cones instead."[81] The family convoy that headed south included Uncle Simanek's "heavy car … a Patterson," Fred Yindra's 1918 Model T Ford, and John Novak's 1913 one-seat Model T Ford "made into a pickup." John "built [his Ford] up so it looked like a covered wagon, and all we had to do was stop and raise the cushion and put a board under it and then pull the mattress forward and just crawl in [to sleep]."[82] John, his wife Mayme, their one-year-old daughter Viola, and the rest of the convoy drove to Chicago; there, Mayme and Viola stayed with Mayme's father, so that Mayme could give birth to her second daughter. John and the others continued

[81] John Novak, "The Story of My Life of Music," 19-page typescript, 1965, p. 4. Document in the possession of Susan Wesley Baker, John Novak's granddaughter.
[82] Novak, "The Story of My Life of Music," 5.

their journey, a "long and rough trip … the roads so bad it took us ten days to drive from Chicago to Silver Hill." Upon arrival, the travelers stayed with John's cousins for "a few days" while they built "two 14 x 28 shacks right among the tall pine trees." Afterward, he wrote Mayme to inform her that he "had the love nest built," and she and their two daughters joined him.[83]

In Alabama, John built a homestead and began to farm. In his words, "now we had two little girls and a [sic] very little money so here is where my cornet became a tool with which I could earn a God almighty dollar." There was "no other job to be gotten … if times were bad in Wisconsin they were two to three times as bad here in Baldwin County … my God blessed cornet and my drums kept us from starving to death."[84]

About a year after Novak's arrival in Silverhill, some children, ranging from twelve to fifteen years old, asked him to teach them how to play like he did. He agreed, and so began his career in music education. In 1928, he accepted the offer to start a music education program at the high school in Brookhaven, Mississippi. He rented his Silverhill farm to others and took his family to Brookhaven where he built a music program, complete with a band that quickly grew to one hundred members. While teaching at the high school, he also organized a band for a junior college at Wesson, Mississippi, and eventually taught at Whitworth College in Brookhaven as well.[85] In 1937, after a fire at the high school destroyed the band's instruments, uniforms, and sheet music, Novak, heart-broken, resigned his position as music teacher and band master of the Brookhaven Public Schools and returned to Silverhill.[86]

Upon his return, John began teaching in the Baldwin County school system. He taught band classes at the high schools in Bay Minette, Robertsdale, Foley, and Fairhope, visiting each school on a different day of the week. He also taught band at the grammar

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Novak, "The Story of My Life of Music," 9.
[86] Novak, "The Story of My Life of Music," 11

school in Stockton, and he taught students from the Organic School in Fairhope who attended band classes with the Fairhope Public High School students.[87] Some of his students became bandleaders themselves.[88] Novak taught all eight of his children to play instruments, and one of his daughters was regarded by some to be one of the best cornet players in Baldwin County. [89] Family jam sessions on holidays were lively affairs and went late into the night. John Novak composed music as well, and in later years, he formed a dance band that played at the Little Bohemian Hall in Silverhill, the PZK Hall in Robertsdale, and the hotels in Fairhope, all while continuing to give private music lessons.

Frank and Clara Prochazka and their children were another prominent Czech family known for sharing traditional Czech musical forms with the community. Frank, born in 1914 in Iowa to Czech immigrant parents, took piano lessons as a child, studied in Europe for two years, and played in his high school band. He moved with his parents to Silverhill and, in 1939, married Clara Dostalek, the daughter of Frank and Andela Dostalek. Another musically talented family, the Dostaleks moved from Montana to a 150-acre parcel of land in Silverhill around 1934.[90] Frank and Clara loved music and their Czech heritage and sought to preserve both. Georgi, the third of the four Prochazka children, studied the clarinet and tenor saxophone under John Novak. James, the youngest, learned to play the trumpet in high school, and local musician John Krauss taught him to play the diatonic button accordion. In addition to playing music, Georgi and James joined the other local children of Czech descent in learning to perform traditional Czech folk dances, taught by their mother Clara, who as a child learned them from Anna Blaha.[91]

[87] Novak, "The Story of My Life of Music," 12.
[88] Fidler, "They Wait for Me," 24.
[89] Fidler, "They Wait for Me," 24; and Novak, "The Story of My Life of Music," 19
[90] Personal interview with Georgi Prohazka Grant, Louis Prochazka, and Eli Krehling, May 2014.
[91] Ibid.

The Prochazka family's musical influence continued well into the twentieth century. Clara taught Czech dancing to Baldwin County children from 1966-1977, and for decades, Frank shared Czech polka music with the public through his "Polka Party" radio show, which was broadcast from Foley on local station WHEP 1310. He also started the Baldwin County Polka Band in 1977; original band members included Frank, Clara, Georgi, and James. The band performed widely in Alabama and Florida until 1990.[92]

Family Histories

THE LIVES OF THE INDIVIDUALS WHO MADE THEIR WAY FROM BOHEMIA and Moravia to settle, ultimately, in Baldwin County provide insights on the development of the county and its communities that data and the outline of history cannot convey. Between 2007 and early 2020, I interviewed more than thirty descendants of Czech settlers, all of whom either came to Baldwin County as children or were born there. All told me stories of their parents', grandparents' and, in some cases, their own experiences as members of the county's Czech community. These are more than "family stories." They record elements of the Czech immigrants' struggle to find their place in America and to provide for their families in difficult circumstances. They also provide insight into Baldwin County's history and economy. Their stories round out the picture of the Czech migration to Baldwin County.[93]

The Kulička Family

The Kulička family was one of the first Czech families to settle in Baldwin County. They arrived in 1909 to join the fledgling Czech colony begun by Karel Hanak. Joseph Kulička, Jr., born in 1888, and his brother Anton, born in 1890, came with their parents from Moravia to America in 1891 through the Port of Galveston. They

[92] Ibid.

[93] Additional stories of Czech immigrant families who settled in Silverhill are available at Owen, "Silverhill History," http://sites.rootsweb.com/~alcsilve/ (accessed February 4, 2021).

originally lived in Halletsville, Texas, where Joseph, Jr,. married another Czech, Agnes Drozd, in 1906. The young couple moved to Silverhill, along with Joseph's mother and his siblings Anton, Celestina, and Klotilda.[94] Beginning in the 1930s, Joseph, Jr., owned and operated the Silverhill Creamery and Ice Company. He designed both the PZK Hall and the Bohemian Hall, and his brother, Anton, donated the land on which the latter was built.[95]

The Kucera Family

The Kučera family played an equally important role in the establishment of Baldwin's Czech community.[96] František and Marie Kucera were born in Vejprnice in the Pilsen region in Bohemia where they were married before coming to America in the early 1900s. The couple first settled in Dillonvale, Ohio, where, in 1904, their son Bedrich "Ben" Kucera was born in a small log cabin by the coal docks. At the age of fourteen, Ben quit school and joined his father working in the coal mines. In 1920, the family moved to Silverhill where Ben farmed alongside his father, periodically taking the train back and forth to Ohio to mine coal or work in a glass factory. In 1924 he returned to Alabama permanently and worked on an orange plantation, on a poultry farm, and for a sausage company in Robertsdale.[97] In 1929, officials asked Ben to become Baldwin County's deputy sheriff because he "knew everybody and could get along with most people" and because he could speak both Czech and English.[98] In this job and his future positions, he served as an important link between the civic administration and the Czech community; he was especially appreci-

[94] Doris Ann Klein Davis, "Joseph Kulička," 2001, in Owen, "Silverhill History," http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com~alcsile/silverhill75.html, (accessed August 10, 2014).
[95] "Silverhill 75th Anniversary," *Baldwin Times*.
[96] In English, the Czech surname "Kučera" is often transcribed as Kucera, pronounced "Ku-chera".
[97] Bender-Bilek Sausage Company, Robertsdale. See Georgia Snašel Kucera, "Jirina (Georgia) Matilda Snašel and Husband Bedrick (Ben) Kucera: The Story of Her Life, Part Two," in Owen, "Silverhill History," http://sites.rootsweb.com/~alcsilve/kucera2.html (accessed July 15, 2020).
[98] Phone interview with Frankie Kucera, Ben's son, May 26, 2020.

ated for his ability to address the tensions and disputes that arose between the Czechs and their non-Czech neighbors.[99] In 1942, Ben became Chief Deputy Sheriff of Baldwin County and was commissioned a member of the Alabama Beverage Control Board, a post that required him to go undercover to find illegal liquor in grocery stores and to arrest moonshiners.[100] From 1945 to 1960, he served as Robertsdale's chief of police, leaving that position to become superintendent of utilities in Silverhill. He was elected to the position of mayor in 1960, 1964 and 1968, serving three consecutive four-year terms.[101] Ben's son, Frankie Kucera, also served as mayor of Silverhill from 1976 to 1984 and was a driving force in efforts to preserve and share Silverhill's Czech heritage, especially the refurbishment of the Little Bohemian Hall.[102]

Ben married Georgia Snašel, mentioned above, in Bay Minette in 1927. Her parents, Karel František Snašel and Vincencie Novotná, came to America in stages between 1913 and 1921, bringing with them their eight surviving children. The family settled in Wichita Falls, Texas, where they worked on farms and ranches. In 1923 they read an ad in a Czech-language newspaper offering good farmland in Alabama, and Karel traveled there with a neighbor to investigate. In 1925 the Snašel family loaded their possessions into boxcars and moved by train to Summerdale, in Baldwin County, arriving on Christmas Eve. They rented a farm and later bought forty acres in Sonora, a community near Marlow to the south of Silverhill. While they built a new home on their land, they lived in two forty-by-forty-foot tents they had set up on the property. After a year in the tents, they moved into their new home.[103]

[99] Ibid.
[100] Georgia Snašel Kucera, with Milton (Bobby) Snasel, "Jirina (Georgia) Matilda Snašel: The Story of Her Life, Part One," in Owen, "Silverhill History," http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~alcsilve/silverhill75.html (accessed August 16, 2014).
[101] "Six Mayors Have Served Silverhill," in "Silverhill 75th Anniversary," *Baldwin Times*.
[102] Frankie Kučera introduced me to some thirty Czech descendants, and provided me with numerous family documents and photos, beginning in May, 2014.
[103] Snasel, "Jirina (Georgia) Matilda Snasel."

The Hovark Family

Czech immigrants James Hovark (born in 1892) and Josephine Novy Hovark (born in 1901) came to Chicago, where they met and married. James was a skilled machinist with a good job, but he dreamed of owning his own farm. He read an ad in the prominent Chicago Czech newspaper, *Denní hlasatel,* which had been placed by a Czech realtor named "Veselý," describing the sunshine, warm breezes and plentiful, fertile and inexpensive farm land around Silverhill and Robertsdale.[104] Sometime in the 1920's, Hovark bought the first twenty acres of a farm that would eventually grow to more than one hundred acres, located about a mile down a dirt road off Highway 90 near the community of Elsanor.[105] The Hovark family grew corn, cucumbers, potatoes, and beans on their land, supplementing their crops with a family garden. The children helped pick the crops and load the wagon to go to market in Robertsdale. The family also raised chickens, cattle, and bees and sold eggs, meat, and honey.[106] James was active in the local Czech community, serving as the treasurer of the local potato shed. He assisted his neighbors by repairing local farmers' equipment, and he and Josephine were members of the PZK.

The Hovarks had the first of their eight children, Elizabeth ("Betty"), on October 8, 1919, at their home in Phillips, Wisconsin. The other seven were born in Baldwin County. As was usually the case in Czech families, the family spoke Czech at home, and Betty did not learn English until she went to the Elsanor School, a two-mile walk from her home. The only other Czech child at the school was Helen Hradecky, from Chicago. The two became lifelong friends, even after Helen's family moved back to Chicago.[107] Betty recalled that her Elsanor School made her feel welcome, despite her foreign-

[104] Veselý is an alternate spelling of Weselý, the surname of the agent who also advertised in the farm journal *Hospodář*.
[105] Phone interviews with Elizabeth Hovark Sykora, May 17 and September 2, 2016.
[106] Elizabeth Hovark Sykora, notes sent to the author, November 2, 2020. Sykora remembered that prices fluctuated based on the season and the weather, and that cucumbers sometimes brought a dollar or less per bushel.
[107] Phone interviews with Elizabeth Hovark Sykora, May 17 and September 2, 2016.

sounding name and her lack of English, but her school experience was different from that of many of the children of Czech immigrants whom I interviewed. Those who spoke of their grade school memories told me they always felt different, that they didn't fit in. Some, including my Aunt Lucille, told me that their teachers, as well as some of the children, made fun of their Czech classmates. During World War II, one of Aunt Lucille's teachers told her that her father was probably a German spy.[108] Nevertheless, members of the community were supportive of each other. When a fire destroyed the Hovarks' house, their neighbors, family, and friends helped them build a new home.[109]

Betty Hovark studied typing and home economics at Robertsdale School until the eighth grade, when she was needed at home. She later contacted an employment agency in Chicago and moved there to work as companion and helper for a disabled woman and subsequently as a nanny. She returned home to Alabama each summer for vacation, and after a couple of years, she relocated back to Baldwin County and married Joseph (Joe) Sykora, the son of Baldwin County Czech immigrants Frank and Mary Sykora. Joe worked for the railroad, sorting mail on the train between Bay Minette and New Orleans. Betty stayed home in Loxley, caring for the couple's four children. She earned her GED, graduating at the top of her class. She served as treasurer of the PTA, as leader of the 4-H club, and as a member of the Homemakers Club.[110] She also learned the Beseda as an adult, and when dancing, she wore the Czech dress, blouse, and vest her mother made for her.[111]

[108] Phone interview with Lucille Mildorf Denham, various dates. The family name "Mildorf," sounds German; however, the Mildorf family was thoroughly Czech, and the family history has been traced back to the Bohemian village of Mšec, where Mildorf family members lived from the early 1700s until the mid-twentieth century. Today descendants of this branch of the Mildorf family live in two cities near Mšec.

[109] Sykora, notes sent to the author, November, 2020. Betty discovered the fire and helped the family escape the burning home, saving few possessions. The family lived in a chicken coop while their new house was being built.

[110] Sykora, notes sent to the author, November 2020.

[111] Phone interview with Elizabeth Hovark Sykora, May 17, 2016.

The Mildorf Family

Many of the Czech immigrants, including my grandfather Václav "James" Mildorf, came into the country through the port at Galveston, Texas.[112] In 1907, at the age of twenty, Václav made the journey with two other young men from his village.[113] He worked as a cowboy on the Davis Ranch for three years, then left Texas as a member of a threshing crew, following the wheat harvest north to the Dakotas. He then moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, where, because he was certified as a journeyman butcher and sausage maker in Bohemia, he was able to get a job working in a large meat-packing plant.[114] In 1913, he married my grandmother, Helen Vandas, the daughter of Czech immigrants, and the two bought a small farm in the Czech enclave of Phillips, Wisconsin. In 1921, James, Helen, and their three children moved to the 160-acre farm he bought two miles east of Robertsdale.[115] Two sons enlisted in the Army and fought in the European theater of World War II; Frank served in Italy and Fred in northern Europe, including the Battle of the Bulge.[116]

The Kralik Family

Like many other Czech immigrants, Alois Karel Kralik first heard of the opportunities available in Baldwin County through an ad in a

[112] Czech immigrants named "Vaclav" typically became "James" in America, though a literal translation of the name would be "Wenceslaus."

[113] Those young men were Josef Pitra and Eduard Rubes. They left the village of Srbeč with Vaclav and sailed on the *Cassel*, arriving in Galveston on May 5, 1907. See Leo Baca, "Czech Immigration Passenger Lists, Volume III: Galveston, 1907-1914," Czechoslovak Genealogical Society, International, https://cgsi.org/members/passenger-ship-records (accessed May 18, 2017).

[114] "Certificate of Apprenticeship Completion," April 15, 1904, Mšec, Bohemia, by Master Teacher Josef Loskot, Mayor of Mšec, Jan Duras, and Trade Representative Anton Pucholt. This document certifies that Václav Mildorf successfully completed his apprenticeship, becoming a journeyman in the "butchery trade." Document in possession of author; see also Mildorf, "Pioneers in Early 1900," 1, 2.

[115] In his handwritten autobiography my father noted that his father had moved the family from the Czech colony of Phillips, Wisconsin, to Robertsdale, Alabama, in 1921 because he had seen an "advertisement for farms" in a "farm magazine." See Mildorf, "Pioneers in Early 1900," 5. *Hospodář* was the Czech publication most closely matching that description in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

[116] Helen died in 1939, James in 1959.

Image 3. Left to right: Fred, James, and Frank Mildorf, on the family farm, 1945. Fred and Frank had just returned home from service in the U.S. Army in Europe in WWII. Author's photo.

Czech newspaper. Born in 1881 in Letonice, Moravia, Alois married Emilie Mazal (b. 1879 in Otnice, South Moravia) in 1904. The couple had five children, and in early 1914, Alois left Letonice for America. Emilie followed a few months later with four of the children, including their infant son who had been born that February.[117] Small of stature, Emilie somehow managed the journey with four children, including a babe in arms, plus at least two heavy handbags, in which she carried a small "stump" anvil and another anvil made from a

[117] Phone interviews with David and Ken Kralik, grandsons of Alois and Emilie, and genealogist Shirli Kralik, David's wife, various dates between 2018 and May 2020. The couple's fifth child, a daughter, was ill and remained in Moravia with a relative.

piece of rail from a railroad.[118] Alois and Emilie first settled in Texas, near Alois's sister. Finding work harvesting sugar beets, the Kraliks followed the harvest north from Texas to Nebraska and then on to Minnesota. By 1916 Alois was working as an orderly in a hospital in St. Paul.[119] In 1918, Emilie contracted the Spanish Flu. Alois wrapped her in blankets, put her in the tub, filled it with hot water, and gave her whiskey. She recovered.[120] Two years later, Alois read an advertisement for land in Baldwin County. He and Emilie left the beet harvest in Meadowlands, Minnesota, took the L&N Railroad to Foley and went from there to Silverhill.[121] In 1922, the realtor Anton Wesely and Silverhill founder Oscar Johnson signed Alois' Declaration of Intention to become an American citizen.[122]

The Krejcirik Family

Mary Bosek was born in 1883 in Luby-Klatovy in the Pilsen region of Bohemia. She married a handsome army officer, a barber by trade, who also proved to be a womanizer. After much family drama, Mary's father paid for second-class passage to America for Mary and her husband and they settled in St. Louis, where Mary found employment ironing at a laundry, making nine dollars for two weeks of work, and later in a city hospital. In 1907, Mary divorced her first husband, and the next year, she married Joe Krejcirik. Joe was born in Prušánky, Moravia, in 1893 and immigrated to the United States in 1907, traveling through the Port of Baltimore.[123] The Krejcirik family's search for work took them from St. Louis to Nebraska,

[118] Phone interview with David Kralik, May 2019. A stump anvil is a small block of iron on a stem, used to split stumps or in blacksmith work. David Kralik estimates the stump anvil to have weighed twenty-five-to-thirty pounds and the other anvil to have weighed fifteen-to-twenty pounds.
[119] Phone interview with Shirli Kralik, April 6, 2020. The information is based on records Kralik found in the City Directory of St. Paul for 1916.
[120] Phone interview with Ken Kralik, April 15, 2020.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Phone interview with Shirli Kralik, May 2020.
[123] Mary Bosek, "Memories," a one-page typescript, written ca. 1937. Document in author's possession, provided by Millie Krob Evans, the granddaughter of Mary Bosek Krejcirik and of Joseph and Katerina Krob.

where Joe "worked in the field and [Mary] worked inside." They "made $40.00 a month [working] from daylight till dark."[124] After five months they moved to Klamath Falls, Oregon, and soon after to northern California, where they lived for eight years on a 160-acre homestead. The nearest neighbor was two miles away, and deer, bears, and howling coyotes were familiar sights and sounds. The family went back to Oregon, then again to California, moving "about 5 times in one year" as Joe, a laborer by trade, had to go "[w]herever he could find work."[125] Finally, in 1920, after Joe lost his leg below the knee in a hay-cutting accident, the family moved to Fairhope, in Baldwin County, drawn by an ad placed in a Czech-language newspaper by a local farmer who was seeking a family to help him with his farm.[126]

The Rezner Family

John Rezner left Moravia with a friend, hoping to avoid the draft. After arriving in the United States, John found work in a meat-packing plant in Cudahy, Wisconsin; there, he met and married Dorothy Mlcuch, a fellow Moravian emigrant who had, unknowingly, grown up near John's family home.[127] The daughter of shepherds, Dorothy was timid and shy, and it was a wonder to her descendants that she had come to America by herself. Her mother died when Dorothy was young and her stepmother "was not very nice to her," possibly driving Dorothy to leave home. An uncle was supposed to meet Dorothy at the dock at Ellis Island when Dorothy arrived in 1910, but he never came. Somehow, Dorothy found work as a maid and eventually made her way to Cudahy.[128]

The newlyweds began their life together in a Cudahy basement, and after Dorothy developed asthma, her doctor told her and John to move south, where the climate would be better for her health. John knew someone in Alabama who encouraged him to come down

[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Phone interview with Millie Krob Evans, September 12, 2014.
[127] The original family name was "Rosner." Personal interviews with Albina Rezner Keller, January and July, 2017. Albina Keller was the daughter of John and Dorothy Rezner.
[128] Ibid.

to Baldwin County. The couple bought twenty acres in Stapleton's Woods, east of Fairhope, around 1922.[129] John built a small house that was destroyed in the 1926 hurricane. He and Dorothy built another house, in the same location, where their family grew to four children. The property was covered in pine trees that the family cleared to plant oats. Over time, the family had cows, chickens, a horse, and worked the land with a "matched pair" of mules, "George" and "Ager."[130] The Rezner farm eventually grew to over one hundred acres of land as the family focused on growing potatoes and soybeans.[131]

The Heidelberg Family

Natalia Marie Hlobril was born in 1894 in Kroměříž Bělidla in the region of Moravia.[132] She came to America in November 1913 and a month later, she married her first husband, John Heidelberg, in Arkansas. A Czech, according to his family, John was born in 1886, in Lipovlani, Slavonia, Austria. John, his brother Joseph Heidelberg, Sr., and their parents Anna and Vaclav immigrated to the United States in 1906, passing through the Port of New York.[133] When Natalia and John met and married, he was working in a factory in Arkansas that made oars. John and Natalia, along with Joseph, Sr., moved to Silverhill in 1913 or 1914. Joseph's Heidelberg Sawmill & Planer was an important factor in the growth of the community, as the lumber produced turned into homes, barns, and buildings, including the Bohemian Hall.[134] John and Natalia's first child, Vlasta Cech, was born in Silverhill in 1914. John contracted tuberculosis and died at the

[129] According to Albina Keller, Stapleton's Woods was a 400-acre property owned by the Stapletons, an old Fairhope family. When John Rezner first came to Alabama, he was hosted by another Czech family, the aforementioned Krejciriks.
[130] Personal interviews with Albina Keller, January and July 2017.
[131] Lottie Barrett email to author, June 30, 2020.
[132] Petition for Naturalization, United States of America, 1 August 1940.. Kroměříž Bělidla was a suburb of Kroměříž and no longer exists. See "Bělidla (Kroměříž)," Wikipedia (Czech version), https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bělidla_(Kroměř%C3%ADž) (accessed July 1, 2020).
[133] John Heidelberg's "Declaration of Intention" to become a United States Citizen, April 24, 1916 Petition for Naturalization, April 23, 1923.
[134] "Silverhill 75th Anniversary," *Baldwin Times*, 6-C

age of forty-eight, leaving Natalia a widow with four young children and more than a hundred acres to farm.[135] A resourceful woman, she placed ads in *Hospodář* and another Czech-language periodical seeking a husband to help her rear the children and farm the land. Joseph Chupek, living in Brooklyn, New York, responded. He came to Silverhill and two days after arriving, he and Natalia married.[136]

The Czechs' Legacy

THESE FAMILY STORIES SPEAK TO THE PLACE THAT THE BALDWIN County Czechs hold in the history of Czech immigration in the United States. In fact, the communities in Silverhill and the surrounding region prove to be among the last Czech immigrant settlements in the country.[137] In the early 1920s immigration from Czechoslovakia was sharply curtailed by two laws, passed in 1921 and 1924. Both of these measures intended to reduce the number of immigrants from southern, central, and eastern Europe by establishing quotas. The first, H.R. 4075, "An Act to Limit the Immigration of Aliens into the United States," passed by the 67th Congress, was the first law to institute a limiting quota based on national origin; it limited annual immigration to three percent of the number of foreign-born persons of a particular nationality that resided in the United States in 1910,

[135] Interview with Laddie (Sonnie) Kostelecky, Barbara Kostelecky, Sarah Dittman, and David Dittmann, May 2014.

[136] Ibid.

[137] I am indebted to two scholars of Czech immigration history, the late professor Dr. Stanislav Perkner and Dave Muhlena, Library Director, National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, (a Smithsonian affiliate institution), for their observations about the Czechs of Baldwin County. I became acquainted with these gentlemen in conducting my research, and each independently brought to my attention the possibility that Baldwin County's Czech colony was the last one established in the United States. Whether it was the last, or one of the last, is subject to debate, depending on how one dates the establishment of a colony. Others, such as Libuse and Kolin, two small, unincorporated towns in Louisiana founded as Czech colonies in 1914, could be considered "the last" as well. On the other hand, the largest influx of Czechs to Baldwin County occurred in the years 1920 and 1921, though Silverhill began attracting Czech settlers earlier. Whether the very last or not, Baldwin County's Czech communities definitely are among the last Czech colonies founded in the United States.

as recorded in the 1910 census.[138] The second law further restricted immigration by establishing an annual quota of two percent of the number of residents in the United States in 1890.[139] The quotas imposed by these laws drew from years of low Eastern European immigration, and as a result, the strict limits caused the number of Czech immigrants to the United States to slow to a trickle.[140]

Lest We Forget

THE PERSONAL STORIES OF BALDWIN COUNTY'S CZECH SETTLERS constitute a social history that enlarges our understanding of the county's development, as well as illustrating the hardiness of the Czechs who came. Personal histories demonstrate the circuitous routes that brought Czech immigrants to southern Alabama and illustrate the difficulties faced by immigrant populations, including the Czechs, as they sought to create a new life amidst the opportunities and challenges in Baldwin County and throughout the United States. Cumulatively these stories demonstrate that the Czech immigrants were tough, resilient, and competent. They worked hard, loved their Czech heritage and their new country, and contributed to their communities in many ways.

[138] "An Act to Limit the Immigration of Aliens into the United States," H.R. 4075, Approved May 19, 1921," from American Catholic History Classroom, American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., https://cuomeka.wrlc.org/exhibits/show/immigration/documents/1921-quota and https://cuomeka.wrlc.org/files/original/1a297f362746206 2c246c019ec73fab6.pdf (both accessed June 24, 2020).

[139] Immigration Act of 1924, H.R.7995, passed on May 26, 1924, from U.S. Capitol Visitor Center https://www.visitthecapitol.gov/exhibitions/artifact/hr-7995-act-limit-immigration-aliens-united-states-johnson-reed-act-april-10, (accessed June 24, 2020).

[140] "The Immigration Act of 1924, April 12, 1924," at United States House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives, https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1901-1950/The-Immigration-Act-of-1924/ (accessed June 20, 2020). The 1921 act set the upper quota for Czech immigrants in 1924 at 14,357; the 1924 act lowered the limit to 3,073. As a result, only 2,556 Czechs entered the United States in 1925; 3,150 entered in 1926; 3,168 entered in 1927; and 2,948 entered in 1928. See "Immigration Quotas and Aliens Admitted and Charged to Quotas: By Nationality, Years Ended June 30," *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1929* (Washington, D.C.), 102, https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/1929/compendia/statab/51ed/1929-03.pdf?# (accessed 24 June 2020).

Baldwin County is rapidly changing, as newcomers from "up North" flock to the county for many of the same reasons that brought the Czech immigrants: a lower cost of living; sunshine and mild winters; and a healthier way of life. As the county experiences explosive growth and the makeup of its communities changes, the story of the Czech communities serves to remind residents and scholars alike of the diversity of Baldwin County's founding generations. The presence and impact of the county's Czech immigrants linger in the lives and accomplishments of their descendants, who still live in Baldwin County; in the PZK Hall and Little Bohemian Hall, now used as community centers for all to enjoy; in the names of streets and roads that thread their way through Silverhill and Robertsdale; in the records of service in the military, the professions and the trades that have taken descendants of the Czech settlers far from their Baldwin County homes; and in the many Czech names found on tombstones in the cemeteries of Silverhill and Robertsdale.[141]

[141] The PZK Hall is still renowned for having the best dance floor in Baldwin County. Many streets are named for the Czechs who lived on them or gathered there, including Bohemian Hall Rd., Havel Lane, Heidelberg Drive, Heidelberg Rd., Houska Lane, Krchak Lane, Ted Lysek Rd., Machulka Lane, Mildorf Rd., Rada Rd., Resnik Dr., Rezners Ct., Sanca Lane, Sedlack Rd., Sturma Lane, Vasko Lane, Vasko Rd.