

## BOHEMIAN SETTLEMENTS IN NEBRASKA.

(Translated from the Bohemian weekly Osveta Americka, Omaha, issue of September 11, 1912).

Of all the agricultural states in the Union Nebraska has the largest Bohemian population, although the settling of other states by our people began ten or fifteen years sooner. According to the 1900 census Nebraska had 16,138 inhabitants born in Bohemia and 25,115 inhabitants born here whose parents were born in Bohemia. Then there were 2,104 persons of mixed parentage, one or the other of the parents being Bohemian and 1,253 people whose one parent was born in Bohemia and the other born here of Bohemian parents. Then there were 418 people whose mothers were Bohemian and fathers of another nationality. Altogether then Nebraska had 56,395 inhabitants of Bohemian origin or nativity. If we add to this those of our unintelligent countrymen who call themselves Austrians, we can safely say that there are 60,000 of our people in this state.

It is interesting to note that of the 90 counties of which our state is composed, there are but 6 in which up to 1890 there were no Bohemians living, so we can say that our people live practically all over the state. Our people are settled in the following counties: Boyd, Buffalo, Butler, Cass, Colfax, Cuming, Custer, Dodge, Douglas, Fillmore, Gage, Holt, Howard, Knox, Lancaster, Madison, Pawnee, Pierce, Richardson, Saline, Saunders, Seward, Sheridan, Stanton, Valley. That is to say, in numbers of 100 or more.

It is not known who was the first Bohemian settler in Nebraska, but we do know that in the spring of 1857 Mr. L. A. Schlesinger settled in Washington County. He left his native land, Bohemia, in 1856, because he was a Bohemian patriot and persecuted therefor. He came directly to Cedar Rapids, where his son had been living for two years previous. In the spring of 1857 he took up a homestead in



Washington County, and there too Mr. Joseph Horský had a claim. Mr. Horský later moved to Helena, Montana, where he died at the ripe age of 94 years. In the early sixties when gold seekers rushed to Colorado Schlesinger used to haul freight between Omaha and Denver, until 1865. He bought flour and other provisions in Omaha and hauled the load with oxen across the plains to Denver, where he sold it. He died in Denver about eighteen years ago, at the age of 90 years.

These two pioneers were followed by Edward Rosewater, as far as we know. Although he was of Jewish origin, he claimed kindred with the Bohemians, and although he came here when only twelve years old, and his work was entirely in English and with English <sup>speaking</sup> people, he considered Bohemian his mother tongue.

In 1863 the Homestead Law came in force, which gave to all citizens and to all who intended to become citizens, 160 acres of land, and many of our people took advantage of it. As far as we know, Saline was the first county to be settled by Bohemian farmers. These came mostly from Wisconsin. Among them were Frank, Joseph and Vitus Jelinek, with their parents, Fr. Krten, Vaclav Sestak, John Heman, the Kovarik brothers, Joseph, Thomas and Mathew. These took up claims in 1865 along the Big Blue River. Mr. John Heman also took up a claim near Wilber. Before that he had a small distillery with Mr. Robert Shary near Arago, on the Missouri River, South of Nebraska City. Mr. Heman owned a large estate in Bohemia and in the great political upheaval in 1848 <sup>1848</sup> he <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ very active. He was a member of the Bohemian parliament and one of the delegates sent to the Emperor of Austria in Vienna, and like Schlesinger, he was obliged to leave his native land on account of persecution <sup>by</sup> ~~of~~ the government. This was in 1853. No other Bohemian immigrant before him and probably not after him brought so large a fortune to this country. He had 80,000 gulden, but lost most of his



3.

money in unfortunate land speculations in Wisconsin. In fact, he became bankrupt. His sons, Stephen, <sup>Anton</sup> Charles, Frederick and John lived in Lincoln and Wilber, later in Los Angeles, California. Mr. Shary was born in Prague, Bohemia, a member of the Shary family well known there as proprietors of a large brewery.

The great majority of the Bohemian settlers who settled on the plains and in the valleys of Nebraska in the sixties, seventies and eighties, began with little or nothing, and consequently suffered many hardships. Poverty, illness and hardships of all kinds were their lot for years, but now they or their children are prosperous.