

EVOLUTION OF OUR ETHNIC COMMUNITY IN NEW YORK CITY

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SECOND HALF OF THE 19th CENTURY

Immigrants from Central Europe, arriving to seaports at the Lower East Side of Manhattan initially settled in the area around the Tompkins Square. Later they moved up to the Upper East Side. This was a general migration trend of other ethnic groups: as the newly arrived acquired a safer foothold, they moved from the cramped Lower Manhattan to a recently opened space in the Uptown, not far from what would later become the Central Park.

The Czechs, called in Manhattan Bohemians, took residence in the area between East 65th and East 79th Street, bordered by the Second Avenue and Avenue A (later renamed York Avenue), close to the East River³. This area was generally known as Yorkville. According to old records, up to 90 per cent of Bohemians in this area came from central Bohemia, from around Kutná Hora where in Sedlec was a poorly paying government tobacco factory. No wonder that these people, whole families including children, became cigar makers (doutníkaři), in basement apartments of houses (hauziky) owned by businesses in the cigar industry.

They worked hard and long hours but the pay, compared to the home land was relatively good, the rent and food inexpensive. They raised enough money to allow socializing, even to pay membership dues to numerous ethnic societies that sprung up. Most of the immigrants opened bank accounts and some became inn keepers and others invested in real estate. First Avenue from the East 77th to the East 79th Street was known by locals as the Bohemian Broadway. There were Czech firemen, policemen, letter carriers, restaurant owners, funeral homes, real estate investors, lawyers and doctors.

The Bohemians published, at that time, two daily newspapers in Czech. Initially Mr. Capek of the society Slovanská Lípa owned a paper that soon filed for bankruptcy, losing all its assets of about \$ 1,200. This paper was taken over by Mr. Mašín, owner of a small print shop at the East Fifth Street who renamed it to New Yorkské Listy. About the same time, in 1878 Dělnické Listy transferred from Cleveland to New York City. Another paper started publishing in New York in January 1879, the Sokol Americký. Sokols guarded their cultural heritage and cherished their library, establishing a Sokol library right at the time of founding the Sokol. There is a later record that in 1915 they set aside \$ 100 for the library to acquire the Ottův slovník naučný.

Two new churches served the ethnic community: the Jan Hus Church on East 74th Street at the site of a demolished Our Lady of Perpetual Help and the Saint John Nepomucene Church at the East 66th Street. The Saint John became in the 20th century an important center for religious worship and social activities of Slovak Catholics in New York.

Around 1890 the cohesive community in Manhattan started to disperse when about seventy Czech families settled in Queens, Astoria, an area abounding with farmland and forests. There they established the Sokol Fugner. Other Bohemians settled in Morrisania, Bronx. There was another cigar making manufacture there and at the Karásek inn, the Bohemians established one of the oldest branches of Sokol, named Svornost. That rural inviting location was favored by vacationing Bohemians from Manhattan, especially at the time of Easter. It was Morrisania where the young professor Tomáš Masaryk arrived, first to the NY Seaport on the boat Herder from Bremen in 1878, to marry Charlotte, from the family of the insurance agent Mr. Garrigue. At that time there were no subways, no electric trolleys and the trip to Morrisania by a horse drawn carriage took multiple hours.

The new community of immigrants, despite the hardship of starting a new existence in a challenging environment, brought along from the old country an intense patriotic cultural zeal. The local press reported that Bohemians were cigar makers during the day but actors at night. The number and names of Bohemian clubs and societies varied in the course of years. In 1886 the Bohemian Benefit Order, founded as a life insurance in 1853 in St. Louis, MO, later renamed as the Czechoslovak Society of America (CSA), had a convention at the original Bohemian National Hall, located at 525 East Fifth Street, between Avenues B and C. The Hall was decorated with banners of the 132 constituent lodges belonging to this order that claimed a membership of 6,878. The insurance benefits appear even now as generous: On the death of a member the surviving wife was eligible for \$ 750.

In 1900 the press still reported on the existence of over fifty Czech societies. There was a Czech School established at the Upper East Side in 1867, in addition to a Czech school at the original National Hall on the 5th Street and a school on the 30th Street. A large strike of cigar makers in 1876 – 1877 put many Bohemians out of work and financial woes paralyzed the social life, but only temporarily and the vigor of the community proved resilient.

There was a theater club, dance clubs, bowling societies, French horn players, horse riders, shooters organized in Svornost, further other lodges Slovanská Lípa, Včela, singers in Hlahol, also lodges Národní Jednota, Otakar, Jeroným, Jan Hus, Jan Žižka, Jiří z Poděbrad, Táboritky, Tyl, Pokrok, Queensdale and others. The horse riders used all kind of mares, that during the week pulled heavily loaded wagons but on festive occasions Sokols mounted them for a horse ride, ahead of the music and a marching band.

Of all of these societies the most organized and prominent were the gymnasts (turners) organized in Sokol New York that was founded in 1867^{4,5,6}. In the United States the first Sokol was established in St. Louis, MO years earlier. It was at the August Hubáček inn at the East 5th Street in Manhattan that 59 Sokol members, mostly laborers, acquired a founding loan of \$ 400 to establish their organization. Initially, they had four sections: choral, drama, exercise and education, along with a small library. Actually, there were four branches of Sokol in Manhattan: TJ Sokol, later at E 71st Street, DA Sokol at 72nd Street (later demolished), Slovak Sokol at E 70th Street (presently a sushi bar) and Sokol Orel at Our Lady of Perpetual Help that was catholic.

A Sokol NY flag (designed at the Ursuline convent in Kutná Hora for 200 guildens) and Sokol uniforms represented the organization. In 1882 Sokol NY expanded to include Sokol women, formerly Telocviční sbor paní a dívek v New Yorku⁷. Eventually, many of the ethnic clubs were absorbed by Sokol.

Sokols had strict membership rules. They kept detailed archives and had to pay a membership fee. In 1896 about 10 cents a year were a mandatory member contribution to the Czech School. A gymnast who missed several sessions without excuse was dismissed. Sokols in New York were in close contact with other Sokol

organizations, not only in Prague, but also especially in Baltimore (Sokol Blesk), St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland and Sokol Tyrs in Cedar Rapids. Chicago in those years was the second largest Czech city in the world.

THE BOHEMIAN NATIONAL HALL AND THE SOKOL HALL

The strength of our ethnic life at the Lower East Side was initially maintained by inn keepers of Czech origin favored by the immigrants, most notably the August Hubáček, Svoboda and Wokal inns at the East Fifth Street. In the back rooms, behind the bar with beer taps, there was a modest exercise equipment used by Sokols on Sunday afternoons. In 1884 the inn of Mr. Hubáček was purchased by twenty Bohemian societies and after reconstruction, supported by a loan from Sokol of \$ 2,500, it became the first Bohemian National Hall at 525 East Fifth Street. At that time the Hall witnessed numerous theater performances, society meetings, dances and weddings. The Sokol Drama Club was founded in 1888 at the inn of A. Kopta at the East 2nd Street. Its first performance, *Vrátný z Karlína* was staged at the Bohemian National Hall at the East 5th Street and it yielded a net profit of \$ 46 and 70 cents.

The Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Society (BBLA) was founded in 1892 as an umbrella organization for several ethnic societies and lodges. The relation between Sokol New York, the Bohemian National Hall (BNH) on the Lower East Side and later the BBLA was essentially cooperative but not without frictions. Initially, Sokol was a member of the board of the BNH, being a partial property owner. Later, Sokol became one of the founding members of the BBLA.

An essential role of these constituent organizations was to erect a spacious and representative Bohemian National Hall (BNH) at the Upper East Side where in the course of years most of the ethnic community moved. The space at the Czech pubs and at the original BNH became inadequate to satisfy the requirements of the growing community. Sokol and other organizations fully supported the project for a new construction by frequent fund raising, exhibits and theater performances (one theater performance in 1891 contributed \$ 100 for the new BNH). A concert in 1892, celebrating the 25th anniversary of Sokol NY at the Central Opera House on the 65th Street, was attended by the newly appointed director of NY Conservatory of Music, Antonin Dvorak and his family. This event raised \$ 200 for the new BNH.

A disagreement between Sokol and the Board of the former BNH flared up during planning the new BNH. Sokols insisted on including a large gymnasium at the new BNH for their exercise. Even before, the roots of disagreement were related to BNH Board members who were unwilling to grant Sokols enough space and time for exercise at the former BNH. Sokols insisted on selling the former BNH and from the proceeds and from fund raising, to erect a new building at the East 73rd Street.

In 1893 Sokol NY rejected a proposed contract suggested by the BBLA to commit Sokols to pay in the future an annual rent of \$ 400 for the use of a gymnasium in the projected new BNH. Sokols then withdrew their building deposit of \$ 1,650 for the new BNH. Sokol NY cancelled its membership in the BBLA but it donated \$ 100 for the construction of the new BNH. In December 1894 Sokols collectively attended a celebration for the benefit of the new BNH despite, as they reported "their prominent neglect from the BBLA". Also, "despite past formal disassociation with the BBLA", Sokol NY formally participated in the festive ground breaking for the new BNH. And, later on, in 1915 Sokol NY attended in the new BNH the celebration of the 25th anniversary of founding of the BBLA and it contributed \$ 5 to this occasion.

In March 1894 the Board of Sokol NY voted 142 against 42 in favor of the construction of a Sokol Hall on East 71st Street, independent of BBLA. In 1894 Sokol NY decided to assess each member to contribute \$ 50 toward the Sokol building fund, payable in four years. The building lots cost \$ 13,500, the excavation and rock removal another \$ 8,500. After an initial estimated building expense of \$ 52,815, considered at that time an enormous amount, the new Sokol NY Hall was festively opened to the public in November 1896, after a ground breaking only in June of the same year.

The new Bohemian National Hall (BNH) of 1896 by William C. Froehne, an architect who previously designed the German American Rifle Association Building at the Saint Marks Place at the Lower East Side, was a representative cultural and social center for the large Bohemian community. Situated at the East 73rd Street and after substantial reconstruction in the 1990s it is now again the pride of our ethnic community and of the Czech government.

Construction cost of new BNH in 1896 was reported as \$ 150,000. In addition to the large ballroom on the fourth floor, it had a restaurant, two bars and in the basement a bowling alley, a shooting gallery and a large safe.

Theater performances, dance activities, weddings and exhibits contributed to a sound annual income. The building was also used as a staging area by various ethnic societies for the street parades in Manhattan. In 1899 the building was already considered too small and an addition to the east was obtained. Further expansion occurred in 1914 when a movie theater annex, connected with the main building on E 73rd Street, was acquired on the East 74th Street.

TURN OF THE 20th CENTURY

The records show that in 1900 there was a protest meeting of 600 Bohemians at the BNH who complained to the Board of Registry of New York for designated them as Austrians, rather than Bohemians. According to a contemporary report in New York Times, in 1900 there were approximately 27,000 Czechs in New York. Archives of the Sokol NY reported the strongest membership year being 1911.

In December 1901 the local press published reports on the famous Jan Kubelík's violin concert at the BNH ⁸. He was introduced to the enthusiastic audience by the officers of the United Bohemian Societies. They offered him in appreciation a branch of a linden tree decorated with sixty insignia, bearing the names of each of the constituent Bohemian societies. After the concert, while the ladies were tossing bouquets from the ballroom gallery, maestro's precious Stradivarius and Cremona violins were guarded by a New York Bohemian policeman.

In 1906 a controversy was generated by a catholic priest of the St. John Nepomucene Church who publicly objected to the Czech Sokol teaching atheistic doctrines at the Czech School located at the BNH.

Czech schools in Manhattan⁹ expanded and declined along with the density of the Bohemian population. Rudimentary attempts to establish a Czech school date back to 1856. At that time most Czech immigrants resided at the Lower East Side, between Houston and East 8th Street, between Avenue A and C. The ethnic groups Včela and Slovanská Lípa opened a more definitive school at the East 4th Street, in the building of the German-American School.

The Czech School located for decades at the BNH was founded in 1866. Until the new BNH was completed it used the back rooms of various restaurants in Yorkville. A Governing Board (Sbor zástupců) was elected using school funds provided by lodges: Řád C.S.P.S, Karel Marx No 129 and Petr Cooper No 102. Later joined by lodges Prokop Veliký, Vzdělávací Spolek No 1 and New Yorkský tělocvičný klub, these were contributing to the school with 25 cents from each member. Other clubs supporting the school were TJ Sokol, lodge JE Purkyně, Velkořád státu New York and Setnina Palacký. Lodge Obec Žižkovská was established solely for the support of the school.

With initial \$ 108 the school acquired a part time teacher, benches and a blackboard.

After BNH was opened to public in 1896, it reserved two large rooms for the Czech School.

The response of the community was enthusiastic. In that memorable year one thousand children registered for the school. Such large student body had to be distributed to five classes. The Governing Board included representatives of 51 active member societies, paying the school a fee for each member. In 1901 the tuition of a student was 25 cents per year, for which the child received free educational material.

Česká Čítanka published in 1912 by the Czech School in New York was a remarkable 435 pages publication¹⁰. It contains a chapter by J.E. Salaba Vojan that provides interesting demographic data on the Czech population in the United States toward the end of the 19th century. This data projected the Czech population in New York City on the overall picture of US Czech immigration.

Out of the US population of 93,402,151, the Czechs with about 750,000, represented more than one per cent. The US Immigration Office reported between 1882 and 1910 an entry of 189,423 Czech nationals into the US. Most Czechs lived in Illinois, 200,000, of which 150,000 lived in Chicago, the third most populous Czech city in the world after Prague and Vienna. Nebraska and Wisconsin (mostly Milwaukee) had each over 70,000 Czechs. In Texas there were 50,000 Czechs who mostly emigrated from Moravia. Czech population of Cedar Rapids was the same as in Tabor, in South Bohemia.

Cleveland and New York City both were reported to have about 50,000 Czechs, Baltimore had about 10,000. Prague according to contemporary census had at that time 219,553 inhabitants. The Czech population of New York City equaled that of all Smichov, one of the eight boroughs of Prague.

Čítanka of 1912 had also a chapter on Slovakia and in a half page it reproduced a children story in Slovak language. "The Slovak language is like our Czech language and the Slovaks are our brethren." It reported the population of Slovaks in the United States to be almost half a million.

In 1917 the Sbor zástupců (Governing Board) of the Bohemian Free School, New York published Třetí čítanka, a 144 page book with comprehensive Czech history, that included many illustrations. They also proposed to publish a Fourth Čítanka that was to include the Czech history from the Hussites to then present time. Czech schools in New York were not a substitute but complementary to the public schools, thus the focus on the ethnic history.

The Czech School notably contributed to ethnic cultural activities. There were exhibits of children art, large festivities at the BNH Ballroom for the 15th, 25th and 30th anniversary of founding of the School. Every year in May the School participated in outdoor activities of the Czech Day, with a child troupe of Bubeníci a Pištci (Drums and Fife) marching in a parade.

Continuing dispersion of the Bohemians affected the numbers of students. In 1922 they had already only 500 students, in 1929 only 250. Finally, in 1980 the classrooms at the BNH became silent. The Czech School continued in smaller branches in Astoria in Queens and at Pompton Lakes, NJ.

KENNETH D. MILLER AND THE JAN HUS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Jan Hus Presbyterian Czech Brethren Church at 347 East 74th Street had a prominent position among the Bohemian community on the Upper East Side¹¹. It was erected in 1889 at a cost of \$ 50,000. As of 1915, its congregation of 300 members served the Bohemian community of 30,000. It had a prominent reverend Vincent Písek who kept extensive church records of the parish meetings. In 1914 the space was too constrained and the church built to its east side a six story addition, the Jan Hus Neighborhood House. With club facilities it promoted an atmosphere of a Christian home. Furnishings for the gymnasium, reading room, two pianos, assembly room, dining room, girl's room, kitchen and ten bedrooms cost \$ 4,380.

Shortly after the Neighborhood House opened, the Home Mission Committee of NY Presbytery appointed the Rev. Kenneth Dexter Miller to be in charge of the House and also to be a church treasurer. Miller was educated at the Princeton University where he probably first met TG Masaryk.

Here starts a very interesting story. Rev. Miller spent 16 months (1912-1913) in Bohemia in preparation for his mission in New York. In 1915 the Church celebrated the martyrdom of Jan Hus in 1415 in Konstanz/Kostnice. After the address of Rev. Písek and performance of Czech music by the church choir, the young Rev. Miller reported on his life with Bohemians in Bohemia and documented this with stereopticon slides.

Shortly thereafter, the War Council of YMCA delegated Kenneth D. Miller to accompany the newly formed Czechoslovak Legions in Siberia in 1917-1919. Harsh combat and weather, together with political uncertainty about the fate of the Legionnaires' mission enabled Miller to become intimately familiar with the mentality of the Czech and Slovak soldiers¹². He recorded this unique experience in a detailed diary. In 1922 Kenneth D. Miller published a book entitled *The Czecho-Slovaks In America*¹³. In 192 pages he provided scholarly and fairly exhaustive information on the Czech and Slovak community in America. The value of this unique report is in the close up on our ethnic community after World War I, but especially because in being a critical, non biased account of an American who spent several years in close contact with the Czech and Slovak mentality.

In addition to a review of the communities' religious and political party allegiance, Miller analyzed the Czech and Slovak ethnic press that molded the public opinion of the immigrants. Of interest are the ethnic relations, not only between the Czechs and Slovaks, but also (astonishingly) quite positive contacts between Czech and German and between Slovak and Hungarian immigrants. Both the Czech and Slovak immigrant political leaders were very active in educating their communities in supporting the Czecho-Slovak idea, contributing to the birth of the new Czechoslovak state. There is a pervasive impression of a critical attitude of ethnic religious protestants toward the "free thinkers" and Catholics.

Miller devoted much attention to the ethnic social organizations, benevolent (meant of an insurance type) or non-benevolent and to the lead role of Sokol. Moral standards of our communities were also analyzed. The Czechs quarreled vigorously among themselves but their family life was essentially very stable. Slovak industrial workers who lived in squalid and degrading surroundings, mostly in mountainous Pennsylvania,

were prone to submit to episodic drunkenness and occasional brawls. However, Miller found the Slovak community to be more cohesive, albeit much less integrated with the American environment. On the other hand, he had much praise for the liberating influence of American ideals, strongly embraced by the American Slovaks after many decades of ethnic suppression in the Upper Hungary. The Slovak Americans' transformation to the spirit of freedom was remarkably expressed in the rise of the social position of their immigrant women.

Throughout his long life in New York City, Miller continued his devotion to Czechoslovak cause. When the older daughter of TGM, Alice Masaryková escaped the German occupation of Prague and when in a profound misery, she sought after 1939 an exile and shelter in New York, Miller proved immensely supportive. Alice in her memoirs called him the "Uncle from America"¹⁴.

The Jan Hus Church remained essentially Czech until the 1950's when the diaspora started to take its toll. These days the church serves other ethnic communities and few who walk around it, just one block north of the reconstructed Bohemian National Hall, are aware of its prominent past. The only reminder of its fame are its name, the bronze memorial plaques on the wall facing the side walk and scattered religious banners inside, related to Czech religious history.

WORLD WAR I AND OUR NEW YORK COMMUNITY

There are only sparse notes on important political activities. TG Masaryk addressed a meeting at the Sokol Hall, New York in June 1902 while being a visiting scholar at the University of Chicago. TG Masaryk and his older daughter Alice's association with the University of Chicago before World I was made possible by the Masaryk admirer, an influential and wealthy industrialist Charles Crane who was a Slavic world believer, a friend and political campaign supporter of Woodrow Wilson. This connection proved critically crucial in the American support for a new country, Czechoslovakia.

TG Masaryk also addressed an enthusiastic crowd at the Sokol Hall in May 1918, in anticipation of founding of Czechoslovakia. On May 25, 1918 he held a speech at the Carnegie Hall to a rousing acclaim and then he headed a parade, after all ethnic societies had gathered in front of the Sokol Hall and the BNH. Huge crowds proceeded to the Fifth Avenue and then south. Masaryk then addressed the enthusiastic masses from the balcony of the Plaza Hotel where he resided. On the balcony there was next to the American flag a new Czechoslovak flag (with a blue triangular field), designed for this occasion by the librarian of Sokol NY, Josef Kneclhans.

During WW I the BNH was one of the centers used by our ethnic community to support the American war effort through the Liberty Bonds. An equivalent of \$ 500,000 was sold there. War effort was organized at the BNH by Osvobozovací akce Národního sdružení v New Yorku. Many young men from our ethnic community served in the US Army and some never returned. Others were in the Czechoslovak legions in France, Italy and Russia.

In 1920 after founding of the new Czechoslovakia, Jan Masaryk, the son of president TG Masaryk, the newly appointed charge d' affaires to the United States, addressed the Czechoslovak Chamber of Commerce at the BNH.

In 1922 there was at the BNH a violin concert of the famous virtuoso Váša Příhoda. Net proceeds of \$ 104 were donated to the Czech School.

SLOVAK COMMUNITY IN NEW YORK

Throughout, there were close relations with the Slovak community. Slovak Americans who left the ethnic oppression of Hungary, were eager to take advantage of the freedom offered by the New World. Around the 1900 there has been ever more the use of the term czechoslovak; there were Czecho-Slovak outings and excursions. In 1901 Sokol NY contributed \$ 25 for the flag of a newly established 5th group of the Slovak Sokol, and another \$ 25 for the Slovak Sokol library, also \$ 6 for the 2nd group of Slovak Sokol women.

In February 1918 the BNH hosted a convention of the Slovak League of America, established six years before with a membership of 200,000. The participants declared to support the war effort and to achieve Slovak independence from Austro- Hungary. Albert Mamatey of Pittsburgh, the president of the League, presided at the convention. In 1934 Slovak Sokols had a SLET (gymnastic convention) in Philadelphia, attended by a large delegation from New York. In 1936 the Slovak American Sokols celebrated 40 years of existence by an all American SLET , presided by M.M. Hodža at the Madison Square Gardens in Manhattan. There were 15,000 in attendance, the local press called it the largest such event ever on the US East coast.

POST WORLD I DISPERSION

Later years spelled a decline in the ethnic strength of the NY community. Stricter immigration laws were passed in the 1920's. Promising future in the newly established Czechoslovak republic, the diaspora of previously tightly knit ethnic groups to new job opportunities outside of New York City, a gradual melting pot assimilation, all this exerted its toll on the Bohemians at the Upper East Side.

After WW I much of the ethnic activity was taken over by Chicago which even had a Czech mayor, Cermak. The territorial integrity of the community on the Upper East Side was disrupted when the New York Hospital acquired the land between the York Avenue and the East River in 1932. The elevated subway along the Second Avenue was dismantled in 1940, taking away a convenient link with the community on the lower East Side. Older buildings, some of them in the past squalid tenements where Czech families lived for generations, were replaced by high rises with large influx of wealthier people who had no interest and no relation to our ethnic background.

The first broadcast of the Czechoslovak Radio Program took place in 1933 at the Kocik restaurant at the East 70th Street. Later, its organizer Karol Mikuš purchased a new location called Little Czechoslovakia, between the 72nd and 73rd Street, at Second Avenue. Little Czechoslovakia was a popular dining place with dancing that followed every weekly broadcast. One of the Slovak announcers was Zlata Paces. In 1983 this radio station celebrated 50 years of existence but it fell on hard times for lack of financial sponsors.

There were several additional ethnic societies in 1983: Národní rada žen, Betka Papánková, Ch.G. Masaryk Society, Bohemian Citizens Benevolent Society, Astoria; District Council No. 5 of Metropolitan New York, Lodge bratři od Sázavy, Czechoslovak Service of Radio Free Europe, Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church at 332 E 20th Street, Slovak Sokol Supreme Lodge, Supreme Assembly I.N.S., Slovenská Národná Škola, NY with 70 years of existence, Slovaks in District 10 of NSS, Neodvislý národný spolok NY, Slovenský samostatný v nemoci podporujúci spolok.

Although the Manhattan community began to dwindle, activities at the BNH continued.

In June 1938 there was at the BNH a welcome to the new Czechoslovak consul general, the dinner was attended by 200 guests. In March 1939 over one thousand people attended the annual TG Masaryk day at the BNH. The World Exhibit in Queens, NY in 1939 included a Czechoslovak pavilion that hosted a speech of president Beneš. Facing expansion of Hitler's Germany, this event stimulated a wave of enthusiasm among our New York community.

WORLD WAR II AND AFTER

In June 1944 the BNH hosted the third annual convention of the American Slav Congress of Greater New York, to support F D Roosevelt to run for the 4th presidential term. However, by this time most of the social activities were relocated to the Sokol Hall. During WW II the Sokol Hall witnessed visits and addresses by president Beneš and of the son of TG Masaryk, the foreign minister of the exile government in London, Jan Masaryk. Speakers at Sokol in later years included the Czechoslovak ambassador to the United States Juraj Slávik and the ČS ambassador to the United Nations, Ján Papánek. Jan Masaryk was a frequent visitor to New York, warmly accepted by the New York socialites. He regularly resided at the Carlyle hotel, at the 76th and Madison and occasionally he played at the piano in the hotel lobby.

Pilots who after escape from Czechoslovakia served during WW II in the British Royal Air Force repeatedly visited the Sokol Hall, while enjoying a brief respite from the war activities.

Compared to the WW I, during WW II there seemed to be less enthusiasm in the shrinking ethnic community. War economy contributed to relocation of many families. Young people started to frequent institutions of higher education. Club rooms at the BNH, once very crowded, were rented as studios. The movie annex at the East 74th Street was leased to a private operation in the 1940's. Later, the Light Opera of Manhattan moved in, from 1975 till 1986. This theater happened to be one of the prominent NY scenes: Lisa Minelli had a debut there, starting her career.

Although the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in 1948 brought to New York a new wave of emigrants, this time mostly skilled professionals, their numbers could never replace losses in the community induced by gradual dispersion.

Another radical change to the Upper East Side and its inhabitants was brought about in 1947 when the former meat packing district around the E 42nd Street was assigned to the United Nations. Rapid gentrification and new construction in former Bohemian locations raised rental fees, the property prices and forced much of our ethnic community to leave for less expensive locations, especially the district of Queens called Astoria. In 1964 the BBLA was sued in a NY court for nonpayment of wages to a part time employee. The BBLA president Henry Jochman strived to rent the space in the building to various tenants but he was limited by new NY fire regulations, prohibiting the use of the ballroom, stairs and elevators: there was no money for required reconstruction.

In 1967 at the time of the hundred year centennial of Sokol NY⁵ there were still several ethnic restaurants at the Upper East Side: Zlata Praha at the First Avenue, Ruč Restaurant at 312 East 72nd Street and Vašata at 393 E 75th Street. Vašata offered roast loin of pork or svičková for \$ 4.25, fillet mignon for \$ 5.95. Tatra Travel Bureau in a contemporary advertisement claimed to have been 35 years in existence. Most of the social meetings, Czechoslovak Independence Day and Masaryk day celebrations, were staged at the Sokol Hall. At these social events, an active role had an aging former legionnaire and a long time Sokol member, Dr. Steinbach, a physician friend of the Masaryk family.

In the meantime the BNH was gradually falling in disrepair, missing an adequate income for the necessary upkeep. Even then, BNH was sporadically used for various cultural and political activities. The Council for Free Czechoslovakia, an organization of political exiles aiming at resisting communist oppression, founded in 1949 by prominent politicians, Zenkl, Lettrich, Ripka, Majer, Peroutka, Hlavatý, Papánek, Feierabend, Ingr and others was reunited in 1974 and then, under the presidency of Mojmír Povolný and with vice chairman Martin Kvetko, it regularly met at the BNH. In 1990 this organization acquired a new name: Czech and Slovak Solidarity Council.

The Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences (SVU) established in 1958 and representing Czech and Slovak intellectuals outside of the communist dominated country, also periodically used the BNH. As late as in May 1999 the SVU New York organized a mothers day celebration with reading of the Czech and Slovak poetry. After the year 2000, the American Fund for Czechoslovak refugees, established by Jan Papánek in 1948 and administered by Vojtech Jeřábek and Jan Hird Pokorný, moved its office and archive from Broadway to the BNH.

In the 1990s the Czechoslovak American Puppet Theater directed by Vít Hořejš staged multiple performances at a theater stage located on the ground floor of the BNH.

The fateful struggle to preserve BNH as our ethnic heritage continued. In 1979 the president of BBLA Jochman, under pressure from 30 elderly board members, decided to sell the entire property. This act was stopped when Alex Čech of the Czechoslovak Sportsmen Association, became the president of the BBLA.

The following years marked a dramatic sequence regarding potential loss of the BNH. In 1984 there were problems with the contract of the theater, renting the E 74th Street annex. Legal expenses further eroded the financial base of the BBLA. In 1987 a plan to rent most of the BNH for the next fifty years failed because of the collapse of financial markets. The annex at E 74th Street was sold for 1.5 million dollars.

REBIRTH OF THE BOHEMIAN NATIONAL HALL

In 1989 the renowned New York architect Jan Hird Pokorný was elected a chairman of the BBLA. His influence as a member of the NY Landmarks Commission supported the goal of preserving the building. The street façade was renovated in 1995 to its original design. Despite an effort to save BNH as a historic landmark, in 1990 at a BBLA meeting the members of the remaining lodges still requested the sale of the building. There was a real risk of potential demolition of the building if a new owner decided to construct a skyscraper.

In the year 1999 a BBLA board meeting at the BNH approved the proposal to transfer the building to the Czech government for a symbolic \$ 1.00, in return for the exclusive right for all space on the third floor of the building and a limited use of the ballroom to be assigned to our ethnic community. It became unthinkable to renovate the BNH using resources of our ethnic community. At that time the cost of repairs was estimated at \$ 5 million, with loan payments that would require to raise \$ 600,000 per year. The actual cost of reconstruction became much higher.

The final transfer of the building to the Czech government, safeguarding this important monument of our heritage for the future generations, occurred in 2001.

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