

I. Introduction

The Czech desire to learn about foreign countries and cultures has been historically documented since the early Middle Ages. However, it was traders, emissaries of rulers, soldiers, clergymen or travelers who went beyond the borders of the Czech territory and got to know different cultures. If we disregard a few exceptions within the stages of emigration from the Czech lands during the 1st to 18th centuries (mainly of a religious nature),¹ we can basically speak only of individuals or small groups who migrated from our territory until the 19th century. The 19th century brought the phenomenon of emigration as a mass affair. The reasons for these migrations were primarily social and economic, which is why Czech emigration to the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries is a typical example of a significant outflow of population from the Austrian monarchy, later the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the overpopulation and lack of employment opportunities in certain areas (especially within the Czech lands).

The image of the New World had been shaped in the minds of the population of the Czech lands historically since the 1st century.² However, it was not until the second half of the 19th century that its meaning and importance changed quite dramatically. Czech emigrants believed that the American continent would bring them new opportunities. They hoped to obtain cheap land in the USA and to be able to establish a farm or find well-paid work in American cities, and perhaps their social status would improve over time. For many Czechs, America became a vision of a new life.

As early as 1850, the playwright Josef Kajetán Tyl (1808-1856), in his play *The Maid of the Forest: The Journey to America*, realized how emigration can weaken a nation. While he understood the economic reasons for the Czechs leaving, he agitated against emigration, for he did not want the Czech element to be weakened within the Austrian Em-

1 For more detail, see Brouček, *Etapy českého vystěhovalectví*.

2 Kašpar, "Amerika Jakuba Malého," p. 23.

pire.³ His play, however, could have had the opposite effect to what he hoped and expected. The view of the American political scientist and historian Howard Zinn (1922–2010) was that the first thing Christopher Columbus sought in America was gold.⁴ Did not all 19th-century European emigrants look for cheap farmland or economic security in American cities in the metaphor of gold?

The impetus for this work is the fact that the history of Czech emigration is not yet fully developed. This statement is also true of Czech emigration to the United States during the largest waves of migration in the 19th and 20th centuries. Although many scholarly works have been written on this topic, none has yet focused comprehensively on the Czech ethnic group in the American city of Chicago. After 1900, more than 100,000 Czechs lived there, which represented an incredible force for the development of the cultural, social and, especially, political life of the city's community. Chicago at that time was even considered the third largest Czech city (after Prague and Vienna), making it one of the most important Czech centers in America and the world. The Czech ethnic minority was not insignificant for the city, so it makes sense to describe the ethnohistorical development of "Czech Chicago."

From the point of view of historiography, Czech America is still full of unprocessed topics, although in recent years there have been a growing number of monographs that seek to overcome this lack. In fact, since 2010, more than 10 publications have been published that deal with the subject from many angles. Alena Jaklová has focused on the analysis of Czech-American periodicals.⁵ Dagmar Hájková has treated the Czech-American community during the First World War.⁶ František Hanzlík has dealt with the subtopics of military character and exile.⁷ Marek Vlha has presented a synthesis of the development of the

3 Kutnar, *Počátky hromadného vystěhovalectví*, p. 9.

4 Zinn, *Dějiny lidu Spojených států amerických*, p. 6.

5 Jaklová, *Čechoamerická periodika*, an extension of Jaklová, *Národnostní a sociálně-ekonomická*; further, see Jaklová, *Proměny etnické a kulturní*.

6 Hájková, "Naše česká věc."

7 Hanzlík et al., *Československá obec legionářská v exilu*; Hanzlík, *Vojenský exil a krajané*; Hanzlík, *Krajané a československý*; Vondrášek and Hanzlík, *Krajané v USA*.

Czech community in America during the 19th century in his excellent work *Mezi starou vlastí a Amerikou. Počátky české krajanské komunity v USA 19. století* (Between the old homeland and America: The beginnings of the Czech expatriate community in the USA in the 19th century, 2015).⁸ Josef Švéda has provided a literary perspective on Czech America.⁹ Another partial contribution is made by two publications that bring together the personality of the linguist, orientalist and, for a time, expatriate journalist Alois Richard Nykl (1885-1958), who spent a significant part of his life in the United States.¹⁰ In 2017, two publications were published that deal with the topic of Czech Chicago.¹¹ In the same year, Vladimír P. Polách published a monograph entitled *Krajané v USA a druhá světová válka. Studie na pozadí krajanského tisku* (Compatriots in the USA and World War II: A study of the background of the expatriate press, 2017).¹² The publication analyses the Czech community in the USA during the Second World War, mainly on the basis of an examination of the Czech press. In 2018, a second publication was published by Ivan Dubovický,¹³ who prepared a synthesis of Czech-American relations over five centuries, with an emphasis on the 19th and 20th centuries. Finally, let us mention one more recent work, a book by the historian Martin Boček: *S nadějí za oceán. Soupeření lodních společností o zákazníky v habsburské monarchii na přelomu 19. a 20. století* (With hope for the ocean: Competition between shipping companies for customers in the Habsburg monarchy at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, 2019).¹⁴ The publication describes the functioning of shipping companies in the Habsburg monarchy and at the same time maps the phenomenon of European emigration to the USA from the perspective of shipping companies. This is a rather peripheral topic, yet this work further develops theme of Czech America. A brief overview of recently published scholarly monographs underlines

8 Vlha, *Mezi starou vlastí*.

9 Švéda, *Země zaslíbená, země zlořečená*.

10 Nykl and Ženka, *Padesát let*; Nykl and Ženka, *Poznámky k revoluci*.

11 Kříž and Křížová, *Střípky z českého Chicaga*; Nekola, *České Chicago*.

12 Polách, *Krajané v USA*.

13 Dubovický, *Češi v Americe a česko-americké vztahy*.

14 Boček, *S nadějí za oceán*.

the constant and in recent years growing interest in Czech-American relations, not only from a historical perspective. Let us also add that, in addition to the scholarly literature, several works of art¹⁵ have been produced in recent years that deal with the subject of Czech America for the general public, which is further proof that more and more people are interested in the subject.

Sources and Methodology

Due to the chosen research focus and the time period covered in this book, the main sources are texts that deal with Czechs in America in the years 1848-1945, specifically Czechs in Chicago. It is therefore based on the available literature (in English and Czech), archival sources and periodicals. The emphasis is mainly on sources and periodicals that were published in Chicago.

Sources of information on Czech Chicago can be divided into several groups. Literature on the history of Chicago is very abundant.¹⁶ In most publications one can find information about the Czech community there since it was one of the most important ones. Currently, the *Images of America* series (Arcadia Publishing) is being published in the USA, with several volumes devoted at least in part to the issue of Czech immigration and the development of Czech neighborhoods.¹⁷

In addition to secondary literature, the contemporary specialist literature stands out. The most complete synthesis in this respect is the classic work of Rudolf Bubeníček, *Dějiny Čechů v Chicagu* (History of the Czechs in Chicago, 1939).¹⁸ He first published his work in the *Denní hlasatel* magazine, then proceeded to publish it in a book, though on a smaller scale than he had originally planned. His history thus ends

15 See, for instance, Fučíková, *Historie Čechů v USA*; Nekola, *Pražané ve světě*; Pánek and Kaňáková, *Čechoslováci ve světě*.

16 For example, Skerrett and Pacyga, *Chicago*; Durkin Keating, *Chicago Neighborhoods*; Pacyga, *Chicago*; Spinney, *City of Big Shoulders*.

17 For example, Deuchler, *Berwyn*; Magallon, *Chicago's Little Village*; Pero, *Chicago's Pilsen Neighborhood*; Sternstein, *Czechs of Chicagoland*.

18 Bubeníček, *Dějiny Čechů v Chicagu*.

in 1893. Bubeníček drew on a large number of sources, and at the same time conducted a number of interviews with witnesses. He carefully critiqued the information from almanacs and memorials published in the town, especially for individual anniversaries, and tried to verify it from several sources.



The professional literature of the time is represented by other historiographical works (e.g., by Jan Habenicht¹⁹ or Jaroslav Egon Salaba-Vojan²⁰), various practical manuals (cookbooks, medical books), but also textbooks, from which a lot of information can be extracted using the proper methodology.

The *Amerikán národní kalendář* for 1896, published by Augustine Geringer in Chicago.
Source: *Archive of Jaroslav Kříž*.

There were many Czech-language newspaper and periodicals published in and around Chicago. Among the most important newspapers were *Amerikán*, *Denní hlasatel*, *Národ*, *Spravedlnost*, *Svornost*, *Vesmír* and *Ženské listy*. The vast majority of these were published by August Geringer. Among the most important of these were *Svornost* (published from 1875) and *Denní hlasatel* (from 1891). In 1878 August Geringer began publishing his own almanac,²¹ the *Amerikán národní kalendář* (American national almanac), which became the first Czech almanac in the USA and is still a unique and unsurpassed source in terms of distribution and duration. In addition to printing many memories of the first settlers, the almanac also recorded the history of the Czech minority in the USA, making it an important historical source.

19 Especially Habenicht, *Dějiny Čechův amerických*; Habenicht, *Z paměti českého lékaře*.

20 Mainly Salaba-Vojan, *Česko-americké epistoly*; Salaba-Vojan, *Památník*; Salaba-Vojan, “České Chicago”; Salaba-Vojan, “Z minulosti.”

21 The first Czech printed almanacs can be found as early as the 15th century. They were mainly used for entertaining reading; they also usually contained a planetarium (interpretation of the signs), proverbs and various sayings. They were mainly intended for the lower and less educated classes. See Karpatský, *Malý labyrint literatury*, p. 248.

In the Czech Republic, the most important source is the library and archive of the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, as it contains the most material on the issue of “Czech Chicago” in the Czech Republic.²²

The sources are mostly found in libraries (especially American ones) and to a lesser extent in museums and archives. Separate archival holdings are represented by the Archives of Czechs and Slovaks Abroad at the University of Chicago (ACASA)²³ and the Geringer Family Papers at the Chicago History Museum.²⁴ ACASA was founded in 1972 at the University of Chicago. ACASA’s holdings are very diverse. It contains several thousand books of various kinds, pamphlets, annual publications, almanacs and periodicals, but also archival materials – the estates of prominent Czech-Americans and Czechoslovaks. But these are not only materials published or created in the United States. Therefore, one can also find information about Czechs in Australia, South America, Canada, etc. The archive of the Geringer family at the Chicago History Museum contains documentation concerning August and Vladimír Geringer, Jaroslav Pšenka and Vlasta Adéla Vrázová. It contains documents of a very diverse nature.

Of the documents of a personal nature, only a small number have been published in print – mostly memoirs.²⁵ Ego-documents are – with a few exceptions – not preserved institutionally; many of them still in the possession of descendants of former immigrants. Some of the letters can be consulted in Czech archives and museums, but this is an accidental matter.

The most important sources are almanacs and memorials of individual associations, religious settlements or other institutions. They usually contain a brief history, lists of members and other statistical

22 In addition to the “standard” sources and literature, there are also scrapbooks. The archive of postcards and photographic material is also quite extensive.

23 <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/su/slavic/acasa.html>.

24 <http://www.chicagohistory.org/>.

25 For example, the recently published memoirs of Adolph Joachim Sabath (1866–1952), a prominent Czech-American politician who served for 45 years in the US Congress (elected from Chicago); see Nekola, *Čech v americkém Kongresu*.

data, iconographic materials, photographs, illustrations and (rarely) maps. The statutes of the associations are also preserved (but contain stereotypically repetitive information). On the other hand, these sources show us a certain everyday life of the Czech community in American Chicago during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Archival and Field Research in Chicago

This book is based primarily on short-term archival and field research in the United States. The author conducted two research visits in the USA in 2014–2015. In 2014, he secured an internship at the T. G. Masaryk Czech School, which is located in Cicero, a suburb of Chicago and a former Czech neighborhood. The internship took place from November 10 to December 19, 2014. Thanks to this, the author established contact with the contemporary Czech community in Chicago and was also able to study materials in the ACASA archives at the University of Chicago. He also visited the library of the Czech & Slovak American Genealogy Society of Illinois,²⁶ which was located in Cicero until December 2014, but is now housed in the public library in Riverside (also a suburb of Chicago). He has also conducted several field investigations in former Czech neighborhoods, from which he has collected much pictorial material.

The second stay took place in July 2015, within the project “Interdisciplinary Issues in the Study of the Czech Ethnicity in Chicago in the Years 1848-1918,” conducted at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague from the funds of special university research for 2015. The author was a co-investigator of this project. Archival and field research was conducted in the states of Illinois and Iowa in the United States. Research was conducted primarily at the Chicago History Museum, the Archives of Czechs and Slovaks Abroad, the Czech & Slovak American Genealogy Society of Illinois, the T. G. Masaryk Czech School in Chicago, and the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

26 <http://www.csagsi.org>.



Joe and Rika Mansueto Library and the Joseph Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago. The Joseph Regenstein Library is home to ACASA.

Photo by Jaroslav Kříž.



The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Photo Jaroslav Kříž.

Field research was also carried out in former Czech neighborhoods as part of the study of places of memory. In Chicago, these include the Czech neighborhoods of Pilsen and Czech California. The most interesting place for research, however, was the Bohemian National Cemetery in Chicago, which is still functional and thanks to which it is possible to document the linguistic development on the cemetery plaques (especially post-Americanization – changes in Czech names, the disappearance of accents, etc.).

In the Czech Republic, the author drew materials mainly from the National Library of the Czech Republic in Prague and also from the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures in Prague. There are many books and periodicals (newspapers, almanacs) from the USA. Archival material was drawn from the Museum of the Bohemian Paradise in Turnov, the Mnichovo Hradiště City Museum, the Literary Archive of the Memorial of National Literature in Prague, the State District Archive in Strakonice and the Vodňany Museum and Gallery. The author also used several internet databases (e.g., access to

Czech digitized registers or Kramerius systems at the National Library of the Czech Republic).

As part of his research trips around Europe, the author visited several museums that focus on emigration issues. These included the Maritime Museum²⁷ in Liverpool, England, the Red Star Line Museum²⁸ in Antwerp, Belgium, and the Emigration Museum²⁹ in Hamburg, Germany. These research visits contributed to a greater understanding of emigration issues and also to a broader awareness of the literature, particularly of a secondary nature.

2. Czech Emigration to the USA

People have been migrating since the beginning of their existence. Moving in search of better living conditions has always been part of human nature. Probably the largest movement of migrants is associated with the long 19th century, between 1836 and 1914, when some 30 million European immigrants left for the United States.³⁰ Nearly 5.5 million people emigrated from German-speaking countries alone during this period.³¹ This mass migration across the Atlantic Ocean included a significant proportion of the population of the Czech lands.

Although we can find Czech traces in North America before the revolutionary year of 1848, there were only tens, or at most hundreds, of Czechs there then.³² Augustine Herrman³³ (1621/1623-1686), who

27 <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime-museum>.

28 <https://www.redstarline.be>.

29 <https://www.ballinstadt.de/en/>.

30 Cohen, *Migrace*, p. 70.

31 *Vzkazy domů*, p. 7.

32 For more about the pioneers of the pre-May period, see Rechcigl, *Tam za tím mořem*, in particular, pp. 9-23; Vlha, *Mezi starou vlastí*, pp. 34-60; Rechcigl, *Počátky české*; Rechcigl, "První čeští přistěhovalci"; Rechcigl, "První židovští přistěhovalci"; Dubovický, *Češi v Americe a česko-americké vztahy*, pp. 14-24.

33 In literature, the Czech version "Heřman" is present, for instance, in Nekola, *České Chicago*, p. 6; see also Dubovický, *Češi v Americe a česko-americké vztahy*, pp. 17-18; the form "Herman," with a single "r," is also present; see Rechcigl, "První čeští přistěhovalci"; Vlha, *Mezi starou vlastí*, p. 35.