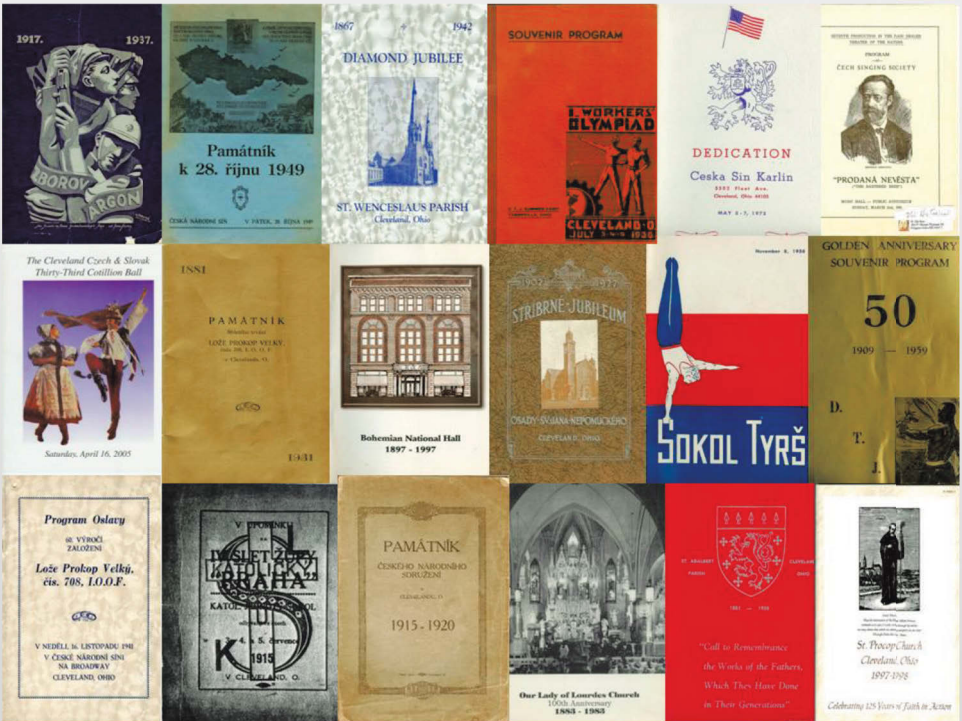


THE SETTLEMENT, GROWTH AND MOVEMENT OF THE CZECHS AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS IN CLEVELAND, OHIO



STEPHEN J. SEBESTA

CHAPTER 1

Who are The Czechs

Any review of the history of the Czechs in Cleveland requires an understanding of Czech political, religious, and cultural history as well as knowledge about the key historical events that influenced the Czech migrations to America and to Cleveland, Ohio. It is important for providing an understanding of the significance of the complex relationships between the many Czech communities, institutions, religious organizations, and fraternal societies in the Cleveland Czech settlements as well to understand the significance of the scores of names used for churches, halls, lodges, fraternal and other organizations, publications, and places.

The Czech Republic is in eastern Europe and is historically bounded by Poland to the north, Germany to the west, Austria and Hungary to the south, and the Slovak Republic to the east. The country is made up of three distinct regions including Bohemia to the west, Moravia to the east, and Silesia to the north. These regions were part of former Czechoslovakia which formerly included the region that is now called the Republic of Slovakia.

This study is limited to those immigrants who emigrated from the greater regions of Bohemia and Moravia as well as the southern segment of the region of Silesia which is now included within the boundaries of the present Czech Republic. These Bohemians, Moravians, and Czech Silesians will be referred to as Czechs in this document.

Early History

Around the fourth century BC, a Celtic tribe called the Boii moved north and east from ancient Gaul (now France) to an area north of the Danube River to escape the Roman invasions. Roman maps identified the area as Boiohemum (land of the Boiians), and the name later took on the Latin form Bohemia.

The Celts, who were more advanced culturally than most European ethnic groups of the time, formed a kingdom of considerable size and were credited with a number of discoveries “such as the use of the potter’s wheel in ceramic production, iron ploughshares on wooden bases, and grinding corn between stone wheels, but also the establishment of specialized production sites from which blacksmiths, potters, jewelers, glassmakers, and other master craftsmen and women supplied their products to wide customer circles” (2). An early Germanic tribe, the Marcomanni, overran the Celtic Boiians in the first century AD. A related tribe, the Quadi, settled in Moravia and the adjoining region in Hungary. These tribes were driven to extinction primarily by the Huns.

About AD 500 various Slavonic tribes migrated to Bohemia to occupy the lands which were vacated by the Marcomanni and Quadi tribes. The Slavs, who first appear in history before 500 BC in an area near the Vistula River area in eastern Poland, already had a common language. According to legend, they were led there by Jan Cechus, a Slav chieftain, and were known as Cechs after that leader. Figure 1 is a depiction of Cech standing on the mountain of Rip choosing the area for settlement (1). Gradually the name Cech applied to all the Slavic tribes inhabiting the area, and the term has been modernized into the form Czechs. Before the close of the sixth century, the Cechs in Bohemia came under the domination of the Avars of Hungary, but early in the seventh century, they regained their freedom under the leadership of the Frank named Samo whom the Czechs elected as their king and who ruled from Vysehrad, now a suburb of Prague. In 706, Bohemia paid tribute to Charlemagne (4).

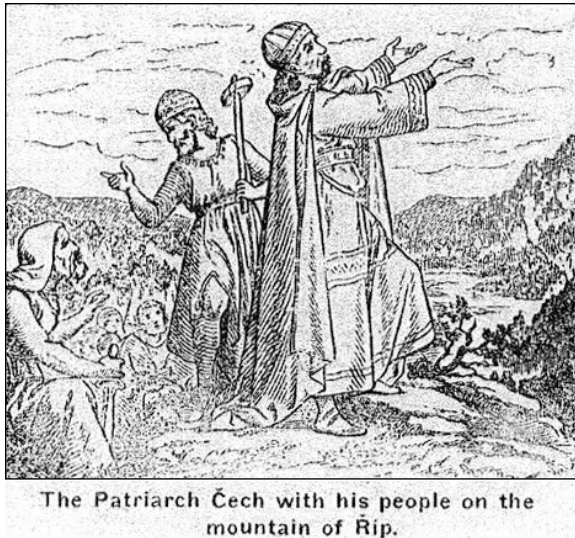


Figure 1. Depiction of Cech on the mountain of Říp (Wikimedia Commons)

Great Moravian Empire (770–960)

Coinciding with the introduction of the Slavic race into Bohemia was a simultaneous arrival of Slavs into Moravia and development of the state known as the Great Moravian empire. In the ninth century the Czechs and Slovaks came under the Great Moravian empire of Rastislav where they prospered until conquered by the Hungarians at the Battle of Pressburg in 907. Greater Moravia covered Bohemia and Moravia, Slovakia, Southern Poland, Ruthenia, the whole of present Hungary, and parts of northwestern Yugoslavia. Moravia was the first major state that was predominantly Slavonic to emerge in eastern Europe, chiefly on what is now the territory of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Figure 2 is a map showing the approximate extent of the Great Moravian empire.

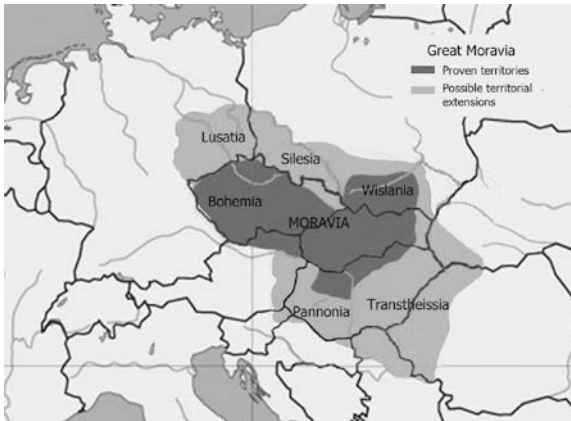


Figure 2. Map showing the Great Moravian empire (9th century, Wikimedia Commons)

In 863 two missionary brothers, Constantine and Methodius, were invited to Moravia by King Rastislav who was not satisfied with the Germanic clergy. Both brothers were fluent in the Slavic language, having learned it as young men from the large Slavic population that had settled around Salonika (Thessalonika) in Greece, so they brought a liturgy to the Slavs in their native tongue. Constantine, later known as Cyril, gave them a unique alphabet based on Greek. Under a later pope, Slavic religious services and the teachings of Methodius were banned, and the Cyrillic script was replaced by the Latin alphabet. While the Cyrillic alphabet and Eastern liturgy survived throughout Imperial Russia and in other areas, the Czechs fell under Roman Catholic domination.

Premyslid/Premeslide Dynasty (9th Century, 870–1306)

When the Great Moravian empire was destroyed by the Hungarians in the Battle of Pressburg in 907, the Moravians became part of Premyslide Dukedom of Bohemia which became part of the Holy Roman Empire. Wenceslas (Vaclav) I, the seventeen-year-old grandson of Ludmila and her husband Borivoj, a Bohemian prince of the Great Moravian Empire, was one of the first of the Premislide family to rule, but after a short reign where he encouraged the acceptance of Christianity, he was murdered by opposing nobles under the leadership of his brother, Boleslav the Cruel. Wenceslas thereafter became known as the patron saint of Bohemia.

The Luxembourg Dynasty (1310–1378)

The dukes of the Premysl line remained unbroken until the line became extinct in 1306. One duke of this line, Wratislav II, received the title of king for life from the German emperor Henry IV. After 1158, the title of king became hereditary. In 1310 the Bohemian throne passed to John of Luxembourg, who held the position of Holy Roman emperor, having gained this position with the support of the Czech nobility through marriage. The Bohemian rulers of the Luxembourg line (1310–1437) from Charles I of Bohemia (the emperor Charles IV 1346), until the extinction of the dynasty at the death of Sigismund (1437), were all German emperors.

Between 1100 and 1400 Bohemia became a powerful political and military force, and Prague became a crossroad of European trade. The Holy Roman Empire invited German merchants, artisans, and miners to settle in Bohemia and in Slovakia. New skills in agriculture and commerce were introduced, and the arts of ceramics, glass, and woven materials were refined. The kingdom of Bohemia reached its height of power and prestige during the reign of the Luxembourg Dynasty. Figure 3 is a map showing the territorial boundaries during the two golden ages of medieval Bohemia (5).



Figure 3. Map showing the two golden ages of medieval Bohemia (1253–1276, 1346–1378)(5)