

Following A Trail Of Shoeprints From Moravia To Maryland

by MacLean Lunko

2026 marks the 150th anniversary of a Czech industrial genius, Tomáš Baťa. Born into a seventh-generation shoemaker's family, Tomáš was born on 3 April 1876 in the town of Zlín. The Baťa family would move to Uherské Hradiště when he was 3 years old. Tomáš got his start in the shoemaking business at the age of 15; however, this early endeavor was unsuccessful.

At the age of 18, Tomáš and his siblings Antonin and Anna decided to return to Zlín and open a shoemaking business. In 1895, the workforce had grown to 50 employees only a year after opening, but Baťas were facing bankruptcy. Antonin was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian Army.



Baťa Administrative Building in Zlín, built in 1936. Baťa's Office was located in an elevator, so he could save time and visit all floors of the building easily.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



REGULARLY SCHEDULED ACTIVITIES

CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE SCHOOL

Children's Language School Fall 2026 semester classes will resume the week of September 13th. The Czech beginner's class will tentatively meet on Mondays at 4:00 PM, and advanced speakers will meet on Wednesdays at 6:00 PM. The schedule may change based on students' needs. Slovak Language children's classes will continue to meet on Sundays: beginners at 9:00 AM, and advanced speakers at 10:00 AM. For more information or to register a student, please visit our website at www.cshamaryland.org

ADULT LANGUAGE SCHOOL

CSHA is one of the few organizations in the USA that offers Czech and Slovak language instruction for adults. Online classes are offered on Saturday mornings. Second-Year Czech, Intermediate Czech, and Intermediate Slovak classes meet at 9:00 AM. The Beginner's Slovak class meets at 11:00 AM. Beginner's Czech and Czech Conversation meet at 11:15 AM. The Fall 2026 semester starts on September 5, 2026, and will end on December 12, 2026. For more information, contact Lois Hybl at 410-428-6012 or e-mail: info@cshamaryland.org.

HERITAGE SINGERS:

We welcome singers of all voice parts. Contact Margaret Supik (443-739-2025) for more information or if you want to join. Future events will be announced on the CSHA website www.cshamaryland.org and our Facebook page.

CSHA ONLINE - For more information about any of these activities, joining Heritage Singers or to register for classes, you can contact CSHA at: info@cshamaryland.org.

The CSHA Board of Directors will respond to your questions and provide the requested information. We would like to hear your ideas and suggestions for activities, programs we should consider, and how we can further improve our events. Please check our website www.cshamaryland.org and follow us on Facebook at Czech and Slovak Heritage Association of Maryland.

JANUARY 2026

The CSHA General Meeting was held in-person on **Sunday, February 1, 2026, from 2 PM- 4 PM** at the St. Ursula Catholic Church, 8801 Harford Road, Parkville. The new CSHA Board was introduced and discussed the organization's budget, Czech and Slovak language schools, as well as future events. We encourage all our members to follow our website for details regarding future events and how to get involved with CSHA activities.

MAY 2026

The 5th CSHA Spring Festival took place on **Sunday, May 3, 2026**, at the Maryland State Game & Fish Protective Association at Perry Hall. It featured live music by Orchestra Prazevica and a fujara / koncovka performance by Bob Rychlik.

The Memorial Day Celebration at the Bohemian National Cemetery on **Monday, May 25, 2026**, was cancelled due to the rainy weather and will be rescheduled for Labor Day, **Monday, September 7, 2026**.

OCTOBER 2026

The 38th Annual CSHA Festival will take place at the Legacy Hall in Sykesville on **Saturday, October 3, 2026, from 12-6 PM**. Visit the CSHA website www.cshamaryland.org and our Facebook page for additional details.

DECEMBER 2026

The traditional Christmas Carol singing is tentatively scheduled on **Sunday, December 6, 2026, at 2 PM**. Mikuláš and Anděl will bring children traditional goodies, and a small reception will follow the celebration, location TBD.

CSHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

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If you have any suggestions or comments or want to contribute to the Hlas by writing an article, email us at info@cshamaryland.org.

President's Message

Dear Friends!

Welcome to the CSHA MD Summer 2026 Newsletter. It feels like just yesterday we were enjoying the lovely spring weather at our Spring Festival, and now we are already preparing for our 38th Fall Festival—yes, it's almost here! This year's celebration will take place a little earlier than usual, on Saturday, October 3rd. We hope this date works well for everyone, and we look forward to seeing you there.

Please take a moment to review the festival poster included in this newsletter. You will also find a form for those who would like to volunteer, place an advertisement in our special festival brochure, or be recognized as a festival sponsor. Your support truly means a lot to us - thank you.

Summertime is also a wonderful opportunity to thank all the teachers and students of our Czech and Slovak Language School for their hard work throughout both semesters—and even during our special summer semester. I am pleased to share that one of our advanced-level students from the children's class participated in the VIII Olympiada for Czech students living abroad, organized by Czech School Without Borders and held under the patronage of Czech writer Markéta Pilátová. The competition consisted of two parts: an hour dedicated to reading and comprehension, followed by a short written essay. This year's theme focused on the life and achievements of Tomáš Baťa, commemorating the 150th anniversary of his birth. The top three finalists will be announced at the XVIII International Conference of Czech Schools Abroad in Prague on July 30, 2026.

This year has been remarkable in many ways, and we are all following the news with a mixture of feelings and hopes. We sincerely wish that

your families and friends are safe, healthy, and enjoying the busy summer season filled with camps, travel, and of course, the grand celebrations of America's 250th Birthday. The festivities across the country have been spectacular, carefully planned, and wonderfully executed.

I am especially moved by the enthusiasm and friendliness shown by Americans welcoming visitors for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. It is heartwarming to see people from around the world experiencing the everyday beauty of this country—good food, convenience, fun, and the charm of our landscapes—through their own eyes, free from the negativity of certain media outlets. My own niece, her husband, and their two adult sons visited from Czechia in June and stayed with my daughter's family. They wanted to experience everything: nature and mountains for the parents, big cities for the boys, and daily American life for all. They were amazed by the generous portions, variety of vegetables, free refills, and seafood - very similar to the delightful reactions we see on TV during the FIFA coverage. Let's hope the goodwill of all people, here and around the world, continues to shine.

Finally, I would like to again invite you to share your stories, interesting articles, and photos with us. We have already written about the importance of the number 8 in our history, but what about the number 6? Or 26? What took place in 1526 in the heart of Europe, in the Czech kingdom? And if you prefer your personal stories connected to the old country or technical topics over history, that is equally fascinating—Czech and Slovak people have contributed greatly to the world and continue to do so every day.

We welcome contributions in Czech, Slovak, or English. Please write to us!

Dana Petran - CSHA president



The Fifth Spring Festival

by Dana Havlik

Since Easter fell early this year, the fifth Spring Festival at the Maryland State Game and Fish Protective Association in Perry Hall was held in May, bringing with it the growing tradition of Majáles—a celebration of spring, freedom, life, and love.

This year's event was slightly smaller but still warmly attended by our members and friends. One of our honored guests was Ms. Paula Kolláriková, Cultural and Public Diplomacy Counselor at the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Washington, DC. She delivered opening remarks expressing gratitude to CSHA for preserving the cultural traditions and languages of Czechia and Slovakia.

Guests enjoyed appetizers provided by CSHA, along with hot dogs and sausages served with homemade sauerkraut. A selection of traditional dishes rounded out the menu, including Pork Goulash (Vepřový guláš), Chicken Paprikash (Kuře na paprice), and Halušky. CSHA bakers prepared an assortment of classic pastries and desserts, and the well-stocked bar featured Czech beers, liquors, and wines.

Entertainment was provided by Orchester Praževica, joined by

Bob Rychlik on koncovka and fujara, performing Czech and Slovak folk songs accompanied by dancers. Children enjoyed a campfire as well as arts and crafts activities, including painting wooden birdhouses.

A heartfelt thank-you goes out to all the volunteers whose efforts in preparation, activities, and cleanup made the festival both successful and enjoyable—and to all our guests for their continued support of Czech and Slovak traditions.



Bar is always offering traditional Czech drinks

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1897 brought Baťa's first successful product, the Baťovka, a canvas shoe. Shoes had historically been made from leather, meaning their raw materials were dependent on the production of cattle and thus were expensive. The Baťovka, using leather only for the sole, heel, and toe were significantly cheaper to make and sell. Baťa's sales rose dramatically, and by 1900, the company known as "T. & A. Baťa" had 120 employees.

Tomáš Baťa made his first visit to the United States in 1905. He toured factories in New England and took the American model for manufacturing back to Moravia. In 1910, a staff canteen was opened to feed Baťa's employees, and in 1912, Baťa began building houses for his employees. Baťa's care for his employees created loyalty to the company, and the company had grown to 400 employees by the start of the First World War in 1914.

During the war, Baťa produced boots for the Austro-Hungarian Army. Tomáš Baťa used the money from these contracts to expand his business and opened a tannery, power plant, and a company-owned grocery store. Before the end of the war, Baťa created a network of shoe stores, allowing direct consumer sales. He also introduced an 8-hour workday, started a company newspaper, and opened a library and kindergarten for the children of employees. By 1918, Baťa had grown tenfold and had 4000 employees. Newspapers began describing T. & A. Baťa as "America in Zlín."



Tomáš Baťa (1876 - 1932)

In 1919, Tomáš Baťa opened his first factory abroad in Lynn, Massachusetts. The 1920s brought opportunities and challenges. While Baťa established an orchestra and opened a movie theater to entertain his employees in their leisure time, the new Czechoslovak state had a currency crisis. The economic hardship caused sales to plummet, but Tomáš Baťa responded by cutting prices in half. This tactic led Baťa to dominate the market. Baťa shared the success with profit sharing, and in 1923, Tomáš Baťa was elected mayor of Zlín.

Tomáš Baťa published a brochure entitled "Wealth for All" in 1926 to promote his business principles. He described his strategy to "convert workers into capitalists." The company continued to expand into other fields. The Baťa Hospital opened in 1927, and the following year, the workforce eclipsed 10,000 people. Production was reorganized to a 5-day work week. A technical school for employees opened, and the business continued to boom. In another two years, employment doubled to over 20,000.

The success of the company led Tomáš Baťa to publicly sell shares of the company, and "T & A Baťa" became "Baťa, a. s., Zlín" in 1931. The new company continued to move from strength to strength, moving into tires, coal mines, ships, and hotels. However, tragedy would strike on 12 July 1932. A plane carrying Tomáš Baťa crashed in Otrokovice, Czechoslovakia. The crash killed the leader of a company that had grown to 31,000 employees and produced 36.3 million pairs of shoes per year. At the time of his death, he operated factories in six cities in Czechoslovakia, 2,500 retail stores, and a network of affiliated companies in 24 countries across four continents.

Tomáš's half-brother Jan Antonín took over the company, and Baťa continued to grow throughout the 1930s. Factories were opened in India, Britain, Beirut (modern-day Lebanon), the Netherlands, Iraq, Dutch East Indies (modern-day Indonesia), Singapore, and France.



Baťa's factory in Belcamp, Harford County, Maryland

Between 1933 and 1938, Baťa purchased several plots of land in Belcamp, Maryland. Construction of a factory, residential neighborhood, and hotel began in 1939. Before the end of the year, Baťa had 600 workers employed in Belcamp. At its peak in the 1950s, Bata's Belcamp Factory had 2500 workers. Unfortunately, in 1995 the workforce had dwindled to 100, and the factory closed shortly thereafter. One of the most famous products to come from the Belcamp factory were US-Military Extreme Cold Vapor Barrier Boots, better known as Mickey-Mouse or Bunny Boots.

Tomáš Baťa was the founder of a shoemaking empire, a global industrialist, and a businessman with an acute sense of social consciousness. He also left another legacy that you see every day in stores at gas stations - the "Baťa price." Baťa found that customers were more likely to purchase a product if the price ended in a "9" instead of a round number. A product marked 19.99 sold better than one priced at 20, regardless of the currency. So, the next time you see a price tag listed as \$18.99, or the next time you pass a gas station sign advertising gas as \$3.599, remember Tomáš Baťa, a man who rose from humble beginnings in Moravia and changed the world by changing the way shoes were made.

FIRE AT BAŤA WAREHOUSE No. 34

The fire that broke out on 9th of July 2026 at Building No. 34 in Zlín was not just a tragedy for warehouse itself and all the companies storing their goods inside, but also a significant loss to the city's architectural and industrial heritage. The eleven-story building, constructed in the 1950s as a central shoe warehouse for the nationalized Baťa works, was part of the distinctive industrial landscape that shaped modern Zlín. The fire began in a shoe-storage area and spread rapidly; fortunately, no one was injured, but a large part of the building was destroyed.

For Zlín, the loss is especially sad and meaningful because the building represented the continuing legacy of the Baťa industrial city, where architecture, production, and everyday life were closely connected. The Baťa company had transformed Zlín from a small town into a major industrial centre, and its buildings remain an important part of the city's identity. The fire raises questions about how industrial heritage can be preserved, adapted, be fully up to the current buiding code while keeping the historical value.

by Olga Mendel



The aftermath of the July 2026 fire of Zlín warehouse builing where many companies stored their goods, including Czech Shoemakers Vasky.

Sokol Baltimore: A Brief History

*based on an article by Dolores Zajicek Gentes
and Frank Huber*

Sokol Baltimore had its beginning in 1872 in a bookkeeper's office in the Kremelberg Cigar Factory at 16 S. Frederick Street. East Baltimore was the center for the Czech-speaking people, which is why it became known as Little Bohemia. The organization grew so rapidly that it had to move its meeting place numerous times. From the cigar factory, Sokol moved to Kopecky's Hall, to Pejřil's Hall, to the German Vorwaert's Hall, and finally to Simek's Bohemia Hall at Broadway and Barnes Street.

As early as 1887, Antonin Primus was selected to attend the Sokol Slet and competitions in Prague, and in 1892, six competitors and one substitute were sent to Chicago to participate in the Sokol Slet and Chicago World's Fair. In 1896, Frank Mendik, a Sokol and an instructor, came from Bohemia to teach the Tyrš Sokol methods to the Sokol unit in Baltimore. During those early years, the Sokols encouraged Enoch Pratt to place a sizable collection of Czech books in the Enoch Pratt Library. Because of a momentous growth in membership and need for larger quarters, the unit purchased land at Gay and Preston Streets, which necessitated that the unit be incorporated as Sokolska Jednota Blesk. The new building held a grand opening on September 6, 1902. It was heated by steam, lit with gas, and not only had a gymnasium, but a restaurant, meeting room, two school rooms, living quarters for the janitor, a manager's office, a bowling alley, a kitchen, three bathrooms, showers, a warehouse, a stage, and dressing rooms.



Sokol Hall from 1902-1954. The photograph was taken in 2014. The back portion of the building, where the gym and bowling alley once were, collapsed during a blizzard around 2010.

In 1906, 130 Sokol members marched in uniform in a parade celebrating the 175th Anniversary of the City of Baltimore, led by their own Sokol band. They were judged Best in the Parade. One of the most unique and dramatic events involving the unit occurred in October 1918. Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, the first President of Czechoslovakia and a long-time proponent of the philosophy of "sound body and sound mind", visited Baltimore. It was a great honor for Sokolska Jednota Blesk to make him an honorary member.

After WWII, it was decided to sell the unit's beloved building and move to a new location at 2931 E. Madison Street. Its grand opening occurred on January 16, 1954. A few years later, in 1962, the unit changed its name to Sokol Baltimore. The unit remained on Madison Street until 1998, after improving the property with a large addition in the rear, which was celebrated with a rededication ceremony marking the 112th Anniversary.

It is significant to note that in 1990, only a few months after the fall of communism, members of Sokol Baltimore proudly participated and carried the Sokol Baltimore flag in an exhibition in Prague. This was the first gathering of Sokols in Czechoslovakia, the birthplace of the Sokol movement, since it was banned by the communists in 1948.

Under the leadership of President Bohus Bata, and with the support of a loyal and enthusiastic membership, Sokol Baltimore continued to offer gymnastics and other physical and social activities that not only benefit the health of its members and maintain the Czech spirit, but also play a significant role in the welfare of the entire community.

When the Madison Street property was sold, Sokol Baltimore moved to the second floor of St. Patrick's Parish Hall on Broadway as a temporary location. Sokol activities continued



Sokol location at 2931 E. Madison Street (1954-2011)

here until 2011. Unfortunately, the “East Coast Earthquake” damaged the building that year beyond repair. Classes were put on hold for 3 years as board members and volunteers worked diligently to find a new home for Sokol Hall. Sokol Baltimore purchased its new home in November 2013. The building underwent over 6 months of renovations to create a welcoming atmosphere and bring it up to date with building code and ADA regulations. The exterior is decorated with a custom mural created by Baltimore artist Julie Lin depicting the movement of Czechs and Sokols from Prague to Baltimore. The grand opening was held in September 2014 to continue a tradition now more than 150 years strong.

St. Patrick's in Fells Point provided room for the Sokol program from 1998 until 2011.



Czech and Slovak Recipe Corner:

by Dana Havlik

Krkonoše Blueberry Dumplings (Blbouni - krkonosšské borůvkové knedlíky)

Blueberry dumplings, known as Blbouni, are a traditional specialty of the Krkonoše Mountains, a region famous for its wild blueberries. Their roots trace back to simple mountain cooking, where local families relied on readily available ingredients such as flour, milk, eggs, and freshly picked forest berries. For generations, Blbouni were prepared as a hearty meal for shepherds, woodcutters, and travelers crossing the rugged landscape. Over time, each household developed its own variation, passing recipes down through families and shaping a rich regional tradition. Today, Blbouni remain an iconic dish of the Krkonoše.

INGREDIENTS (serves 8-10):

- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup milk
- 1 large egg
- 2 tablespoons fresh yeast (or 1 packet dry yeast as an alternative)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 3 to 4 cups of blueberries
- Cottage cheese, sour cream, and sugar, for serving

DIRECTIONS:

In a small bowl, combine the yeast with lukewarm milk and sugar. Sprinkle a little flour over the top, cover the bowl with a cloth, and let it sit for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, place the flour in a large bowl, add the salt around the edges, and crack in the egg. Pour in the activated yeast mixture and knead everything into a smooth, non-sticky dough. Cover it with a damp cloth and let it rise for about 1 hour.

Once risen, divide the dough into 6-8 pieces and shape each into a ball. Cover the dough balls with a towel and let them rest for another 10 minutes.



Pour about 2-3 inches of water into a pot, bring it to a boil, and place the steamer insert inside. Brush the insert with melted butter and arrange the dumplings in the center, leaving space between them. Cover tightly and steam for 8–15 minutes, depending on size. Alternatively, boil them for about 12 minutes, turning halfway through. Avoid lifting the lid while they cook.

When done, remove the dumplings, pierce each with a skewer, and brush with melted butter to keep them soft. Serve with wild blueberries, sugar, cottage cheese, or sour cream and powdered sugar.

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On November 13, 2013, Sokol Baltimore announced the purchase of a building for the new Sokol Hall at 3218 Noble Street, Baltimore. The grand re-opening was held on September 20, 2014