

A publication of the Czech and Slovak Heritage Association of Maryland

Ancestral Journey to the Land of My Grandmother *by John Vanko*

When I was a little boy I learned that my grandmother was not from Baltimore but from somewhere called Czechoslovakia. I had never heard of anyone who wasn't from Baltimore. Baltimore was my whole world. And now that world, I found, was suddenly much bigger than I had imagined.

I subsequently learned that Grandmother could speak another language. I was amazed. I asked her to teach me some Czech. I learned a few words, and she taught me a little song (*Prší, prší, jen se leje...*).

I was fascinated, curious to learn about the place she came from.

When I was old enough, I asked Grandmother to tell me everything she could remember about her family. At first she couldn't recall many names, but slowly the memories came back to her. In 1968, I sat down with her for the first of many interviews, taking copious notes as I began my lifelong research into family history.

In 1981 I wrote a letter of request for genealogical investigations in Czechoslovakia, then a Communist country. I received some good results and some incorrect information too.

Grandmother died in 1987 and was buried

with her husband in the Bohemian National Cemetery on Horner's Lane in Armistead Gardens, in East Baltimore. Her parents, in-laws, and some brothers are buried there too.

Following her death, my Czech genealogical quest took a long hiatus, slumbering through the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the Velvet divorce and emergence of the Slovak and Czech Republics in 1993, with Václav Havel as the first Czech President.

But my curiosity never waned, and so in 2011 I decided the time had finally come for me to visit my grandmother's homeland.

I engaged a husband and wife research team in Prague, Tomáš and Marie Zahn, to expand upon and correct some of my earlier results, and to take us to see the ancestral villages where my kin had lived. The Zahns took me to Strážovice, which is the village of my great-grandfather Josef Šanta, Grandmother's father. (The name Shanta in Czech is Šanta. The S has the little v over it, called a *háček*, meaning "hook". In English Šanta sounds like Shanta, so that is how it is spelled in America.)

Marie also arranged for us to visit a family in Strážovice whose last name was Šanta. So, on sunny day in June 2011, we called on František Šanta and his sisters Božena and Jaroslava at their family farm.



Helen Shanta Vanko 1901 – 1987

continues on page 4

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



REGULARLY SCHEDULED ACTIVITIES

CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE SCHOOL

Fall semester will bring changes to the schedule and location of the CSHA Children's school. Regular language classes for children aged 3 and up will be held every other Friday from 6 to 7:30 PM, rather than weekly as in the past. There will be 3 levels of instruction in Czech this fall (from beginning to advanced). We would like to hold Slovak classes as well, and are currently seeking students.

FAMILY FUN NIGHTS

The Children's School will also host monthly Family Fun Nights offering all CSHA members a chance to get together and share a potluck dinner while celebrating our Czech and Slovak Heritage. Visit our Facebook page or website (see addresses below) for detailed schedule information, or to register.

ADULT LANGUAGE SCHOOL

Do you like the sound of the Czech and Slovak languages? Are you interested in taking Czech or Slovak classes? CSHA is one of the only organizations in the USA that offers language instruction for adults. Beginning, intermediate and advanced classes are offered on Saturdays throughout the year at the Gribbin Centre on Bel Air Road in Parkville.

HERITAGE SINGERS

If you like to sing and to enjoy Czech and Slovak songs, carols and hymns, please consider joining the CSHA Heritage Singers. All voice parts are welcome. The group meets on Mondays from 7 to 9 PM in the months before our Christmas concert and Memorial Day performance.

JULY 2018

CSHA ANNUAL PICNIC - July 22nd, 2018, 2 to 5 PM. See page 6 of this issue for details. Check our website and Facebook pages for any updates or additional information.

SEPTEMBER 2018

CSHA BACK TO SCHOOL FAMILY PICNIC - September 9th, 2018, 2 to 5 PM. See page 7 of this issue, and check our website and Facebook pages for further details.

OCTOBER 2018

CSHA'S ANNUAL FESTIVAL - Sunday October 28, 2018, noon to 6 PM. This year's festival will coincide with the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the free state of Czechoslovakia. Planning is underway for a special celebration of this historic event. We encourage you to sign up for the Festival Planning Committee and get involved.

DECEMBER 2018

MIKULÁŠSKÁ - The date and location are still to be determined, but Mikuláš, Čert and Anděl are coming for sure. Details will be provided in the next issue of HLAS, and on CSHA's Facebook page and website.

CHRISTMAS CONCERT - Date to be determined, but you can look forward to enjoying Christmas carols sung by our Heritage Singers at St. Wenceslaus Church in East Baltimore. The concert will be followed by a reception with Czech foods and refreshments.

HLAS - The CSHA newsletter comes to you with a new look. Read more about the updates to HLAS on page 8. We are also pleased to introduce a new member of our team, Dick Mendel, a professional editor. If you have any suggestions or comments, email us at info@cshamaryland.org. You can find back issues of HLAS at www.cshamaryland.org.

CSHA ONLINE - For more information about any of these activities or to register for classes, you can contact CSHA at our new email address: info@cshamaryland.org. CSHA's new Communication Committee will respond promptly to answer your questions and provide information, and we are eager to hear your ideas and suggestions. Also, please check our website www.cshamaryland.org and follow us on Facebook at Czech and Slovak Heritage Association of Baltimore.

President's message:

While anticipating the upcoming 32nd Annual Festival, it is hard not to think back to the thirty-one preceding festivals and the people who helped organize them. They represented the Baltimore Czech and Slovak community in its entirety, those who grew up in the old East Baltimore neighborhood, those who came here during the 60's and those who came later. They came together in friendship and respect for one another to celebrate the culture in which they took such pride.

The festival venues changed over the years: that first Czech and Slovak Festival took place downtown at the War Memorial Plaza; before the long run at Tall Cedars Hall, there was a festival in Patterson Park as well as one at the United Steel Workers' Hall in Dundalk. Then there was last year's Festival at the Parkville VFW. A little less than two weeks before the scheduled date we learned that the hall we'd been counting on was not available. But we didn't cancel, we rallied, we worked together,

we called upon that spirit of friendship and mutual respect which had already inspired thirty festivals, and the 31st Annual Czech and Slovak Festival, albeit a little crowded, was a success.

This year we will see two big changes. Our 32nd Annual Festival will be held in a new location, the American Legion Post 22 at 125 York Road in Towson and we will have a new caterer supplying the meals. These changes will bring new challenges; we will be dealing with new workers and new ways of doing things. We have a great opportunity here, a new opportunity to come together in the spirit of friendship and respect for one another to celebrate the culture in which we take such enormous pride. More than ever we will need to rely on everyone's good will and spirit of co-operation. This is what CSHA is, why it was founded, and we have a chance to carry it forward. LET'S DO IT!

Margaret Supik - CSHA president



Easter Traditions Family Fun Night

by Olga and Mia Mendel

As part of our efforts to create more opportunities for Czech and Slovak families and children to enjoy time together, CSHA scheduled two fun activities this past spring.

The first was a mask-making party for the Czech version of Carnival, called Masopust, which was scheduled for March 2nd. Unfortunately, Baltimore weather surprised us with a major ice and wind storm that caused power outages for hundreds of thousands people in the area. Sadly, the Masopust event had to be cancelled.

We did gather a few weeks later for an Easter traditions family fun night, however. Attendance was great, and we gained several new CSHA members. Children had a chance to decorate Easter eggs with paint, yarn, and more, and to color and craft, while adults caught up and tasted goodies from the potluck table.



The most popular station turned out to be the one with the difficult challenge of blowing the yolk and egg white out of an egg while preserving the shell for decoration. We even had to go buy more eggs from the store to satisfy everyone.

Viera Sabol kindly shared her family's decorated eggs with us, showing us a unique art form from Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Over the coming year we plan to continue this new tradition and offer more events that will accommodate everyone regardless of age.



continued from page 1



Reunited After 122 Years

Historical records suggest the property has been in the family since the 1600's. A man named Jaroslav Šanta was a prominent Strážovice farmer in those days. Today the Šantas use it instead as a weekend home – a getaway from Prague where they live and work during the week.

With Marie as translator, I told them all about my grandmother. They told me about their father, who was falsely imprisoned during the Communist era.

Meanwhile, we dined on homemade *koláče* (pronounced ko-LACH-eh), delicious pastries with poppy seeds, plum filling, custard, and some powdered sugar. We drank the Czech liqueur Becherovka (BECK-er-ov-ka).

The talk went to genealogy, of course. We knew we were related, but we didn't know how. We speculated that our connection was with our great-great-grandparents, but we couldn't be sure.

I told them about my recent efforts to collect DNA samples for all my blood relatives. František asked, "Did you bring a kit?" I whirled around with one from my bag, "Yes!" "Would you like me to do it?" "If you are willing." I promised to send results when the tests were complete.

The next day I visited the State Archives in Plzeň to examine and photograph the original church books of births in the Strážovice region.

Later, when I translated the records, I found some tempting possibilities for a connection, but no smoking gun – the names didn't quite match. Then the DNA test results came back, showing a high probability we had a common male ancestor in the recent past. An additional "cousinship" test indicated that we were most likely 3rd cousins, which would be the case if – as we suspected – our great-grandfathers were brothers.

Had we found the connection? Or were there two families with brides and grooms with the same last names? It's possible in small villages.

The final answer came when Božena visited the State Archives and dug up records of the entire Šanta family in the middle 1800's, including her and her siblings' great-grandfather Ján Šanta, and Ján's little brother (and my great-grandfather) Josef Šanta.

Between the DNA results, the church book records, and these state archives, no doubt remained. We are third cousins. As the oldest surviving male child, their great-grandfather Ján had inherited the family farm. My great-grandfather Josef left the area in 1889 with his sweetheart (not yet his wife) to seek his fortune in the coal mines of Northern Bohemia.

St. Michael's Catholic Church in Dolní Jiřetín (Lower Georgetown), Nieder Georgenthal in German, where Helen Shanta was likely baptized. Dolní Jiřetín reached maximum population in 1900 at 3,471 souls, and was torn down in 1983 to mine the coal beneath it. (public domain photo courtesy of Czech Wikipedia)



The next year my father's Uncle Joe was born in Ervěnice. The following year the couple was married. The bride, my great-grandmother Marie Kleisner, was not yet 24 years old – the age then required for a woman in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (there was no Czechoslovakia yet) to marry without her parents' permission. Marie was 23 and 3/4ths and her father gave his permission.

The Šantas soon moved to another village nearby, Dolní Jiřetín, where my grandmother was born in 1901.

In 1904 the Šantas left Dolní Jiřetín for America. Jozef's half-brother, who lived in Baltimore, said there had been a big fire there – the Great Baltimore Fire of 1904 – resulting in lots of work. And that's how the Shantas came to America.

One hundred and seven years later, in 2011, I went to see the village where Grandmother was born. Yet nothing remained but the bend in the road where it used to stand. You



Most's Hněvín Castle (Hrad Hněvín) – visible from all the surrounding countryside

For Grandmother Vanko's FLÍČKY RECIPE - see page 7



ANCESTRAL JOURNEY COMPLETE - Standing with maps beside the lake that fills the pit left from mining coal beneath Dolní Jiřetín, birthplace of Helen Shanta in 1901. It only took me more than half a century and 4,000 miles.

see, the Bohemian coal mines expanded in the years after the family left for Baltimore. Under communism, open pit mining replaced underground mining. Villages were torn down to get at the coal underneath. Both Ervěnice and Dolní Jiřetín disappeared.

Luckily, we did get to visit a castle sitting atop the town of Most, the largest settlement and the highest hilltop in the vicinity – a sight my great-grandfather likely viewed every day as he walked to work.

From the castle I photographed the far away bend in the road between two manmade lakes where water filled the holes left by coal mining. Then we drove down to the lakes and stopped. We got out of the car and stood for photographs.

The emotions that swept over me that day are difficult to describe. Maybe it's enough to say that I felt a deep sense of satisfaction. I had fulfilled my lifelong dream to visit Grandmother's birthplace. Life had come full circle.

CSHA Member Annual Picnic - July 22nd, 2018, 2 to 5 PM

DIRECTIONS to RED EYE YACHT CLUB, 2222 Poplar Road, MD 21221
THE PLACE OF CSHA PICNIC, SUMMER 2018
For info call Bill Schuman, home: 410 335 3476, cell: 443 250 5027

Travel on I 695 South, after exits of RT 40. keep left at the fork to continue on 702 S, follow signs 702 S/Essex.

8) At the traffic circle, take the 2nd exit onto SE Blvd

9) Continue onto Back River Neck Rd

10) **Bear** left onto Holly Neck Rd

11) Turn left again onto Cedar Creek Rd

12) Turn right onto Marsh Rd

13) Continue onto Silver Lane Rd

14) Turn left onto Poplar Rd

!! Destination will be on the left !!

Please note, distance on map is greater between points A and B

RED EYE YACHT CLUB
CSHA Picnic

The CSHA Annual Picnic will take place at the Red Eye Yacht Club as in previous years. You can look forward to burgers and hot dogs provided by the CSHA. Beer will be available for sale and we hope everyone will bring a dish to share. See map for directions and hope to see you on July 22nd from 2 to 5 PM.

This event is free for members. A donation of \$10 per person is expected from non-members. If you are behind on your dues, bring a checkbook (or cash) and renew your membership right at the picnic.

See you soon!!!

Memorial Day at Bohemian National Cemetery *by John Vanko*

Mostly drizzling rain ceased just before the opening of this year's Memorial Day service at the Bohemian National Cemetery, 1300 Horner's Lane in Baltimore.

Jeanne Taborsky, the Cemetery's incoming president and CEO, opened the service with an update of officers for the Cemetery Company, a subsidiary of the Grand Lodge ČSPS (Česko-Slovensko Podporující Společnost; roughly "Czech and Slovak Assistance Society), the founding Lodge of ČSPS in America.

Jeanne and the other officers were elected after the passing of the previous president, Michael Rokos, a stalwart of the Baltimore area Czech/Slovak community who also served as CSHA's president from 1995 to 2004. As the new president and CEO of the Cemetery, and also the Grand Lodge, Jeanne pledged to bring the Cemetery into compliance with the Maryland Office of Cemetery Oversight,

restoring the Cemetery's good standing with the state.

Next, Eva Slezak spoke about her initiative to identify all veterans resting in our Cemetery. (As a longtime ČSPS board member, Eva is responsible for placing flags by the graves of our veterans.) Finally, John Vanko spoke about his Czech Grandmother's influence on his life, and the discovery that his heritage was also Slovak as well as Czech.

Greg Satorie gave the Memorial Prayer and led a musical program by the CSHA Heritage Singers, which finished with a touching rendition of "Going Home." The day concluded with a walk through the Cemetery, the planting of flags, and a final visit to the Bohemian National Cultural Center in the caretaker's cottage, where refreshments and light Czech fare were served.

CSHA Back to School Picnic - September 9th, 2018, 1 to 5 PM



The first annual **CSHA Back to School Family Picnic** will be held at Gunpowder Falls State Park - Hammerman Area, Elm Shelter on Sunday, September 9, 2018 from 1 to 5 PM. We will be grilling burgers and hot dogs provided by the CSHA and we would like everyone to bring a dish, snacks or drinks to share. The park has plenty of open space and playgrounds, covered shelters with grills and picnic tables. We hope many of you will join us to celebrate the end of summer.

Since this is a state park, there is a \$3 per car fee at the park entrance. You can find more information about the location, including driving directions here:

<http://dnr.maryland.gov/publiclands/Pages/central/gunpowderhammerman.aspx>

Czech and Slovak Recipe Corner:

Grandmother Vanko's FLÍČKY recipe

INGREDIENTS:

1 ham hock or smoked neck	4 tbsp. butter
6 quarts water	6 eggs
1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon salt	3 cups whole milk
8 oz. egg noodles, homemade or fresh	1/4 teaspoon white pepper

PROCEDURE:

Cooking the Ham and Noodles

1. In a large stock pot, bring 6 quarts of water and 1 tablespoon of salt to a boil. Add ham hock, cover, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer for 1 hour. After an hour, remove the ham hock to a cutting board to cool.
2. Bring the ham hock water back up to a full boil. Cook the noodles for approximately 12-15 minutes, being careful not to overcook them. The noodles will acquire delicious flavors from the smoky ham broth.
3. While the noodles are cooking, pick the ham meat off the bone, discarding connective tissue, tendon, and fat. Dice the meat into small pieces.
4. When the noodles are tender, drain them in a colander, and then transfer to a large bowl. Add 2 tablespoons of butter, and toss to keep them from sticking together. Cover bowl with kitchen towel to hold in moisture.



by John and Jane Vanko

Preparing the Casseroles

5. Pre-heat oven to 375°.
6. Butter two 13 x 9-inch casserole dishes. Spread approximately 2 cups cooked noodles across the bottom of each casserole. Sprinkle the diced ham over the noodles.
7. In a medium-sized mixing bowl, beat three eggs until frothy. Stir in 1 ½ cups milk, ½ teaspoon salt, and 1/8 teaspoon white pepper. Pour the custard mixture evenly over the noodles in one casserole. Repeat the procedure for the second casserole. Dot each casserole with 1 tablespoon butter, cut into small pieces.
8. Bake the casseroles in the upper third of a preheated oven for 30-40 minutes, until the custard is set and the noodles are just beginning to brown.
9. Remove casseroles from the oven, and serve hot.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Ancestral Journey to the Land of My Grandmother	pp. 1,4-5
Calendar of Events	p.2
President's message	p.3
Easter Event Write-Up	p.3
CSHA Annual Picnic	p.6
Memorial Day Write-Up	p.6
CSHA Back to School Picnic	p.7
Recipe Corner	p.7
A Word about HLAS	p.8



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A Word About HLAS' New Design

CSHA has been thinking for some time about updating the look of our newsletter, and with this issue we have finally done so. We hope you will like the result.

Thanks to our own Alex Vanicky for designing a new header for HLAS featuring patriotic colors and linden leaves. It echoes the logo on our website which was designed by Jane Vanicky.

Olga Mendel has managed the process of updating the layout and design for the rest of the newsletter, keeping colors and style to match the cover while providing you with more legible and easier-to-navigate content. Also, by starting our cover story on p.1 and including more on the back page (table of contents, CSHA officers and committee chairs, and other info), we can devote more space in HLAS to providing you news of interest to the local Czechs and Slovaks.

In addition to the design changes, we

have also added two new regular features to HLAS. First is a President's Message where you can read comments from CSHA's president, Margaret Supik. Second, responding to feedback we received over time, we are introducing a new Recipe Corner.

Again, we hope you will enjoy the new and improved HLAS, But please keep in mind that the design is not set in stone. If you have ideas or suggestions, or just want to let us know what you think of the new HLAS, please email us at info@cshamaryland.org.

!!! Great News !!!

For the first time, credit cards will be accepted for purchase of entrance fees, meals and memberships during our Annual Czech and Slovak Festival on October 28th, 2018