

MINNESOTA GERMAN-BOHEMIAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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LuAnn Lindmeyer, Editor

NEWS FROM THE PRESIDENT...

Dear Members;

October 20th is another important day for our organization. There are two events taking place on this day. At 9:00 A.M. you are invited to attend a meeting which will be held at the lower level meeting room of the New Ulm Public Library. This meeting will conclude at 11:00 A.M. and then you are invited to take a short walk to German Park for the ground breaking ceremony of our monument.

Our meeting will be a business meeting and whoever can attend is encouraged to do so. You will receive an annual report and will be electing board of directors. There are four people whose terms are expiring. They are Harriet Eckstein, Kurt Eisen, LaVern Rippley, and myself Paul Kretsch. If present board of directors want to remain on the board they need to be nominated and elected by the members to do so. Any member has the right to nominate a candidate of their choice. All names nominated will be placed on a ballot and four will be elected by a voting process. The board of directors elected at this meeting will serve three year terms.

Any member who knows they can not attend this meeting can mail us their choice for a candidate and the persons name will be brought forth at this meeting. Members must be present to vote.

The ground breaking ceremony is an historic event and we are holding it on this day to provide you the opportunity to be a part of it. Detailed explanations of this event will be given at the meeting.

I'm hoping to see all of you at both events.

Sincerely,

Paul Kretsch

COMING EVENTS

October 20th: Business meeting and ground breaking ceremony.

November 17th: Board of Directors meeting.

January 19th: Board of Directors meeting.

February: Benefit dance.

The Post-1989 Experience Of Entering Bohemia

By La Vern J. Rippley

When planning this year during April to travel through Czechoslovakia during the summer of 1990, I contacted the Czech embassy in Washington inquiring what kind of visa and what currency exchange regulations would apply. I was told that the regular visa with the usual fee of \$18 still was in effect and that the currency exchange was in the process of being modified so that by the time I would reach the border in June '90 I would only be obligated to pay \$25 as an entry fee for each individual and not

be burdened with the currency exchange rate of \$18 per day for each member of my family. Before leaving the United States, however, in late May 1990. I received word from a friend in Washington who had gone in person to get a visa the Czech embassy only to find anoe on the door that a visa was no longer necessary for Americans. Instead of that a one-time \$25 fee was to be paid by each person crossing of the border.

When my wife and two grown children approached the Czech border from the North in mid July, therefore, we were fully prepared to shell out a total of \$100 to cover the costs of all four in our party, and then we planned to manage all our tour sites within the country so as to avoid re-crossing a border and a repeat of the \$25/person fee. This we felt would be somewhat inconvenient because we wanted to from Silesia (Poland) in the North to Vienna but with visits to the Bohemian villages of Bischofteinitz en rout. This would have meant going on a more northerly parallel from a pont east of Vienna to a point west of Salzburg and back again to Vienna.

The day was hot and the sun bright, the column of cars wanting to cross the border from Poland to Czechoslovakia extremely long. We were already annoyed because we had gone up to the border form Poland at a point farther east and were told only pedestrians on foot could use that crossing. Needless to say, we had to take our rented car with us. So at the new site, we were forced to wait about two hours. When we actually got nearer the actual border we began asking questions. There were Swedes, Danes, Germans all in their cars, a few Hungarians, and of course **no other** Americans. The Swedes and Danes both knew they had to fill out extra paper forms and pay 50 DM (\$33 per person) for transit for themselves. There was no getting out of that! Likewise, the word in the automobile column was that Americans also had to pay about the same amount as everybody else, but that the West Germans were now exempt from any border payments. We felt a little put out to learn we as Americans and Scandinavians were going to have to pay that kind of money since everybody (at least in out little entourage) knew that the West Germans have a lot more money these days than any of us nationals from whichever side of the ocean.

As the line inched forward during the long ticking of the minutes, we all had our activities: Some ate lunch--we did too--others were checking the oil, examining the loud mufflers or the exhaust train, a few even changing oil and performing similar chores on the vehicle, Our children had lots of fun going to the snack bars up ahead at the border and purchasing things to eat for the many Zloties we had left from Poland and knew we could not spend or exchange anywhere else in the world. And even though they knew the Zloty currency was now worthless to us, they still enjoyed making offers and bargains with the vendors. I also went up ahead to fill with diesel fuel (while the Swedes saved me a place in line) because we had learned meantime that the fuel was more expensive in Czechoslovakia than in Poland (\$2.60 per gallon vs. only about \$1.00 in Poland and that it was even higher in Austria), while my wife read or visited with the Swedes. I even went up to the guards and ask4d for the necessary forms I would have to fill out so that we could be winning the paper battle while wasting our time. But when they saw my passport they refused to give me any. I wondered-- was the informaiton of the door of the Czech embassy in Washington, relayed to me via a friend a cruel hoax? Would I have to go back to Poland - being without a Czech visa - and this now after having squandered the Zloties?

Finally we were able to drive our car up to the window and hand in our passports to the official. Recognizing them for American passports the guard barely glanced at them, and returned them with smiling wish, "Have a lucky trip" (confusing his English with the German saying of *Gluckliche Reise*) and when we were too stunned to speak, he said "Go on, don't waste time on the border", to which my daughter

instinctively answered rudely, "After two hours waiting here, you should talk!!"

But that missed the point! Larissa had not been there before. In the old days when we had our visas, we changed our \$18 per day, and after searches and checks of our luggage and car, could move through smartly if with a gnarled feeling in your stomach. Now that everyone can come in without a hassle, the major crossing points are crowded. So there is a tradeoff! But to our great joy, not only is the visa gone but so is the restriction of entry fees or currency exchanges.

Needless to say we changed our route. We went south to Vienna, then came back to Salzburg and returned north to the area of Furth im Wald. For the first time since the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1919, tourists are now permitted to move freely and uninhibited in the Bischofteinitz district of Bohemia. Of course no restrictions apply any more anywhere. I was especially thrilled to drive up into the semi-mountainous areas of the Bohmerwald to villages of Rindl, Waier and others where previously the guards occluded all travel by foreigner and natives alike because of the mandatory depopulated strip back some 10 kilometers from access to any point in the West.

Today you can drive right up to the German border from the Czech side in the East, provided a road exists, though not all the former crossings have yet been opened. Crossing back into Germany can only be effected at the official border crossing. Still, in this area which is not on main roads leading into the Czechoslovakian heartland, as was the case coming out of Poland (a main thoroughfare for Scandinavians heading for Yugoslavia) the wait is much shorter. And the guards are as friendly as any you might have experienced anywhere.

People told us we could not get accommodations anywhere this year in Czechoslovakia. This also proved to be incorrect. In smaller towns, including points in Slovakia farther east, we found good and friendly service, although in Prague the centrally located hotels were all taken thus we needed to rely on the services of a local room finding agency (which was sometimes necessary previously in Prague as well). Unlike in Poland where the free market economy has stabilized the Zloty, in Czechoslovakia the black market still operates for a more favorable currency exchange form German Marks or dollars, but the advantage is not very great. Central banks offer a tourist rate of 25 Koruns to the dollar whereas the black market might go as high a 30/one. Being better than twice the former rate, the tourist can indeed enjoy the good life in Bohemia.

With free movement and access now possible everywhere in the country, I can truly recommend Czechoslovakia! It shows its beautiful countenance everywhere and is trying to develop its economy. A cloud on the horizon is the threatened secession of Slovakia, but that could not be all disastrous since Bohemia in the West had always been oriented more toward Vienna whereas Slovakia more naturally felt a tilt toward Budapest. Perhaps the day will come when a realignment may include a more north-south affiliation (Bohemia to Austria) with Slovakia reverting once again the Hungarian sphere of influence.

I wish you a happy visit to this central European nation via the German Bohemian Heritage Tour being planned by Robert Paulson with Marie Korenchen for August 1991.

La Vern J. Rippley

