

## "Czechs in the Romanian Banat" by Milena Secká\*

At the end of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, society in the Austrian monarchy saw many changes, primarily in the Maria Teresan and Josephin reforms that caused a disruption in the social and agricultural conditions in the Czech lands. The Patent to Abolish Serfdom [M.C. from 1781]\*\* and the Patent of Tolerance [M.C. from 13.10.1781: protestants are allowed to come/settled in Banat] provided important momentum for the further development of capitalism in towns and even villages and to lessen the oppressive personal dependence of serfs on the feudal lords, so as to facilitate further expansion of the labor market, which was necessary for the progress of manufacture and the first factories.

Even though the reforms were intended to improve the situation to a wide extent, their dissemination met with resistance from the reigning class, and after the death of Emperor Joseph II [M.C. on 20.02.1790], there was an attempt to return to the pre-reform ways the reforms did not occur as a matter of course; many were annulled, many were not enforced equally, and finally the result was significantly problematical.

Also the international situation at the end of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century strongly influenced life in the Czech Lands. The French revolution, the anti-Habsburg uprising, war with Turkey and France, all had an impact upon radicalization of the widest stratum. The government reacted to the resistance of the serfs to feudalist regime and the pro-French sympathy to the repressive measures of the police regime. Metternich's policy suggested various social changes, but everything was viewed with suspicion and stifled from the very outset.

Not even the rural situation was uncomplicated, even when at the end of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century there was gradual progress in agricultural technology and in agricultural systems used in cultivation of the land. Whereas the large estates used new technology, products and techniques, the small farmers, oppressed by the serf and labor system, continued to farm in the old ways. The years of crop failures 1781-'84, 1805-'06, and 1815-'17 were disastrous for the serfs, for they brought hunger, and many farmers fell into debt and lost their property. National bankruptcy in 1811 was catastrophic. The hardest burden was borne by the rural poor who, besides their serfs' dependence on the feudal lords, were also dependent upon rich farmers. After many years of war with France, additional burdens were imposed on the serfs by the state in the form of taxes and increased duties. The serfs had to pay assessments for the needs of the military, and furthermore they were subject to military conscription. The resistance of the people compelled the government in 1802 to shorten the lifetime military obligation to 10 years (for the infantry and commissariat), 12 years (for cavalry) and 14 years (for engineers). The question of where returning veterans fit in became urgent, especially for their home communities. Agricultural and social relations of serfs continued to worsen after the end of the eighteenth century. Besides passive resistance to turning over taxes and tributes, the instances of eluding forcible conscription and the numerous desertions from the army increased antagonisms and conflicts.

In the towns, a number of manufacturers appeared, a lot of trades lost their markets, and among the Czechs there arose a group of impoverished subjects who were dependent on their rich masters. Manufacturers and factories called forth a new level of society -- the proletariat; its status and living conditions was a source of constant discontent. General discontent with the social situation amongst the serfs, as well as the small tradesmen and soldiers who had served their time, led to their migration and search for better living conditions. Therefore, when there appeared in Bohemia agents seeking mercenaries to clear cut virgin forests in the region of the southern Banat, there was an immediate abundance of people who were interested.

The Banat was originally, and up to the year 1552, a section of the Hungarian empire when the Turks conquered it. After hard-fought wars, Leopold I recovered\*\* the Karlovic Peace [M.C. the peace treaty was signed at Karlowitz / Sremski Karlovci on 26.01.1699], and into the uninhabited and desolate region of the Banat came the first colonists, in response to his invitation [M.C. false! Under Leopold I no colonists came in Banat].

In the year 1702\*\* the regular army was installed in a section of the Banat [M.C. false!], and from the time of the Pozarevacky Peace in 1718 [M.C. Passarowitz / Pozarevac Peace treaty was signed on 21.07.1718] there was in the whole of Banat a so-called military frontier.(1) In the bordering regions were the administrative centers of military garrisons, set up to confront possible "Turkish dangers", and which were subordinate to the military governor in Temesvar [i.e. Timișoara]. Strategic, agricultural and political grounds were compelling factors in the settlement of this region by workmen and mainly by reliable colonists.

The first Austrian governor, General Count Florimund de Mercy [M.C. Count Claude Florimond Mercy d'Argenteau was Banat's military and civil governor between 1.11.1716 - 29.06.1734 ], administrator of the military frontier in the years 1718-1734, along with the elected emperor Karel VI [M.C. Carol VI, B 1.10.1685; emperor 1711-1740, king of Hungary as Carol III, D 19/20.10.1740], initiated the settlement of the Banat territorial plains with Germans from Southern Germany, from Pfaltz, Saxony, Horni Poryni, and later even French from Alsace-Lorraine, who soon became Germanized. The mining regions to the north were settled by Germans from the Tyrol, Styria and Bohemia.(2) Maria Teresa and her successors proceeded in the organized settlement of the Banat with more Germans and French and even Italians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Poles, Slovaks, and Gypsies and also several waves of Czechs.(3) The southernmost area of the Banat remained relatively unpopulated until the first twenty years of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, with wild beech woods and several Romanian

villages and cottages. From a military viewpoint, it was a strategically important place to see settled as soon as possible, according to the constant reminders by the military command of the XIII<sup>th</sup> Romanian-Banat border regiment in Caransebeș, and the XIV<sup>th</sup> Illyrian-Banat border regiment in Weisskirchen [M.C. Fehértemplom / Bela Crkva]. General Schneller, who was commissioned by the settlement, established cordons (small forts), roads and highways.

At the beginning of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century there lived in Oravița in the Banat a rich man, whose name is given variously as **Jiří Madarli**, [M.C. being a Hungarian, his first name would be János] Magyarly, Magarly, Mandzarii, etc.(4) This person leased a huge section of forest from the government at a low cost, and the felled trees from it he sold at a high price, returning the cleared land to the government. At his instigation, agents went to Bohemia seeking suitable woodcutters and forest laborers.

Prospective men were promised liberal amounts of wood for building a home, 1 - 1/2 acres of land (which they had to clear themselves), tools, a wagon and a team. Ideal work, good profits and, most important, their own home and field enticed many people, who saw in the Banat the opportunity to improve their living conditions.

Historical sources for the most part state only that the Czechs came into the southern part of the Banat either as woodworkers of this entrepreneur, or later on being called to service on the military frontier. R. Urban (5) is the only one who states that the proprietor had to lure the Czechs into the Banat because the leadership of the military frontiers rightly feared that the people would not voluntarily decide for army guard duty. Whether it was from the side of the military officials or not, it is certain that the promised advantages came at a time when the political and especially economic problems to migrating were challenging, and that is why the invitation met with such a powerful response.

The **first group of colonists** set out for the Banat in the year 1820-'21, the second one in 1823, and the third in 1824. Altogether 80 families of laborers from the mountains, woodsmen, joiners, carpenters, blacksmiths and miners from Plzeň, Klatovy, Domažlice, Kladno and Čáslav traveled across Budejovice into Vienna and on across the Hungarian plains. They traveled in large wagons covered with rushes, taking with them, besides the most necessary items, their tools, and some even took cattle. The trip lasted almost two months, and some people died along the way from the hardship, and several were born along the way. The first two groups (52 families) of emigrants were settled by a woodworking renter in the new settlement **Elisabethfeld** (called Lizabeta), and the third group (28 families) of Czech evangelicals from the congregations of Vilémov, Hořátev, Libice (nad Cidlinou), Kšely, and Nebužely established the settlement of **Svata Helena**, about a three-quarter hour walk east from Lizabeta.

The year **1826** brought the colonists great trouble. The tenant who was obliged to be responsible for the woodworkers and maintain for them a so-called canteen, where food could be bought cheaper along with the chief provisions, without warning loaded his goods on wagons and rode off. The Czechs were abandoned, left without means. Stores would not let them buy on credit; they were regarded as hired labor whose employer should take care of them.

The caretakers of both colonies finally decided to leave for the nearest military office in Serbian Pozezin and apply to be taken into the military frontier. Then Colonel Drasenovich, commander of the XIX<sup>th</sup> border regiment, arrived from Bohemia, and gave the petition to F.M.L. Count Schneller in Temesvar, and then he sent the matter on to the government office in Vienna. There they arranged to merge the two colonies into one border town with a guardhouse, town hall and maintenance of roads.

In Lizabeta, because the forests had been cleared, they had no water, so everyone began moving to Svata Helena. The local military office started building homes for the emigrants, and the last one was completed after thirty years. The Vienna counsel wrote to the Czech governor asking him to allow more people to come to the Banat who would be interested in being border guards.(6) Whether this was all a collusion between the tenants and the commander of the military frontier will probably never be known, but the first two settlements created the foundation for the next Czech settlement.

Those who were interested in colonizing the Banat border were promised their transportation, 3 crowns for each child, and 6 crowns for each day's living expenses (this was to be paid by the time of the first harvest, but payment actually took almost 5 years), a 10 year exemption from military duty, use of land from the felled forests, tax exemption for 10 years, free grain for sowing, wood for building a home and constructing paths, 13 acres arable land, 4-1/2 acres pasture land for cattle, and land for a house and garden. This enticing invitation from top administrative authorities met with great interest.

The emigrants received from the main regional office travel documents "Entlas-Schein" and "Exhibitori Praesentium", written in German and Latin and signed by the Czech administrative authorities. The military frontier wanted 500-600 families to a colony, but the invitation caused emigration fever, and finally Count Chotek of the Czech administrative authorities had to ask two Viennese offices to jointly forbid emigration because of the threat of depopulating some regions.

Minister Kaunitz replied that the Entlassungsschein should be given to only those families which have Zertifikat no. 5754, which meant an acceptance document from the commander of the fourteenth border regiment guaranteeing that there was a available space.

Those interested in emigrating were retail tradesmen, woodcrafters, lime-burners, farmers and soldiers who had served their time from Pizeň, Klatovy, Domažlice, Litoměřice, Chrudim, Beroun and other regions, all of them Roman Catholics. As opposed to the previous transports, they traveled from Vienna by boat; besides personal belongings and farming needs, people brought wagons and cattle, and the trip took about one month. The commanders announced each transport in advance so that everything would be ready -- the largest transport consisted of 80 families. In each new plotted community there were erected for the colonists' spacious wooden huts, and each family had their land measured off in advance of their arrival.

In **1826** Colonel Drasenovich had land plotted for the following **new settlements**:

- 1) Biger and Schoy (Schnellersruhe)
- 2) Gernik and Rcoy (Weizenried)
- 3) Wallia and Tissovitza (Eibenthal)
- 4) Mujeris (Frauenwiese)
- 5) Mrakony (Kvarzheim)
- 6) Brebul (Weidenthal)
- 7) Spimluy (Wolfsberg)
- 8) Sagorubuy (Wolfswiese)
- 9) Kraku Csenlly (Lindenfeld)
- 10) Ranitzi (Weidenheim)
- 11) Ravenska
- 12) Schumitza
- 13) Alt-Sadova
- 14) Neu Ogradena
- 15) Neu Schuppanek.(8)

All these settlements were in the years 1826-'28 inhabited largely by Czechs, settlements number 6-10 mainly by Germans living in Bohemia, especially from Cheb and the Bavarian border.(9)

Already on February 9, 1828 the colonel from Caransebeş announced that 1.036 transferred Czech families had received acceptance documents from the military frontier, and that there were 613 remaining available homes for Czech clergy and teachers, which were greatly needed.

According to the official statement from the year 1830, there were living in the new settlements the following numbers of Czech colonists:(10)

Weizenried	469	inhabitants
Schnellersruhe	266	"
Ravenska	237	"
Eibenthal	356	"
Frauenwiese	186	"
New Schuppanek	43	"
Schoenthal	281	"
Schumitza	123	"
Weidenthal	597	"
Wolfsberg	444	"
Wolfswiese	256	"
Lindenfeld	166	"
Svata Helena	338	"
Elisabethfeld	118	"
Total:	3.880	Czechs and "Czech" Germans

Even when the settlers were under the care of the military officials, during the first years there was much privation and disillusionment, and there were even those who set out on foot to return to Bohemia. Their stories then discouraged many interested persons. Two cottagers from Rakovnik stopped in Vienna on their return from the Banat and personally informed Emperor Francis I of the lamentable situation of the colonists. The Emperor resolved that prospective emigrants be informed and warned of what they might encounter, and as a result, the number of emigrants declined until they stopped altogether.(11)

The last group of Czech colonists, which came in the 1840's and 1850's, did not head for the mountains, but stayed in the plains of the

fertile regions of the Banat.

### **Life of Czech Settlers in the XIX<sup>th</sup> to the turn of the XX<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

The first years of the Czech colonists in the Banat Mountains were very difficult. In the first place, the landscape and climate were entirely different from the eastern Bohemian regions. The mountain terrain with impermeable virgin forests full of wild animals and severe cold brought a number of colonists to their deaths. The land was measured off for the colonists, and they had to clear it for themselves and for the settlement. They lived with often as many as five families in a dwelling that the military command had prepared. They had been assured of the availability of food, but often it was not provided punctually. There where shelter was not provided, the settlers hollowed out the earth, and in addition to casualties during work which resulted in death, there was death from hunger, cold and illness.(12) They also had to endure the wars between the Banat Serbs against the Hungarians, which took place in the first Czech villages during the years 1848-49, The Czechs who lived helplessly in bermed or wooden houses became victims of the bloody conflicts. Those who could would quietly escape to the Banat lowlands or into what is now Serbia. Most of those quickly became assimilated and merged with the local inhabitants. After wearisome work the colonists did finally clear a portion of the woods and, by agreement, gave over the timber to the administration and, according to accounts, already the third year after resettling there appeared wooden homes of the Czech settlers.(13) 17 acres of land had been promised each individual by agreement, he could take as much woods as he wished, improve the land, but the timber had to be relinquished. Taxes had to be paid on the land taken. Freshly cleared land did not yield at first, in many places springs had dried out, and therefore with the permission of the military command, occasionally settlements were abandoned, and these people moved on further into the Banat, Hungary or Serbia.(14)

The crops from new fields were threatened not only by climate and the condition of the soil, but by animals and also the local Wallachians (i.e. Romanians). Many Czech parcels of land were plotted near Wallachian huts which the military command ordered torn down, causing the original owners rancor and envy.(15)

As soon as the settlements were at least temporarily arranged and equipped, the military command built in each town a town hall, the inhabitants were to soon establish their schools, and the command, besides promising the materials, assured them of a teacher and a priest. To this day the town hall is called "guard house", and the small squads, which were originally housed there, oversaw order in the town and served guard duty at the Danube border.

Even though the great lure for the first settlers besides the land was exemption from military duty, soon the men who were so privileged waived this privilege and in return were given woods by the military command. Later they were required to do border duty for twelve years, but the years did not have to be served consecutively and the men served their time when they wished.(16) In the "guard house" there had to be at all times a minimum of five men who kept watch over the town and its closer surrounding areas. That border service lasted up to the year 1873 when the military frontier was disbanded [M.C. on **8.06.1871**].

Moreover, many colonists were not farmers until they came to the Banat. As soon as they cleared their plots of land, they had to sow and concern themselves with making a living. The skill of tradesmen was useful, but the main source of making a living was one's own field. After the first few years, the fields began to yield and most families had abundance. The Czechs who came to the Banat brought with them technical knowledge of agriculture which was unknown to the local inhabitants, and large harvests caused envy. Except for the deliberate destruction and theft by Wallachians, and what wild animals and severe climate destroyed, there was also loss by fire, and in the early days it sometimes spread through the whole village. Wooden buildings and the provisions in them often burned to ash. Another unfortunate occurrence, which up to then was unknown to Czechs, was earthquakes. The Czech settlements were laid out in a relatively active seismic zone, so Czechs had to accustom themselves to this reality.(17)

Separate farms were forced by objective conditions to become self-sufficient, at least in regard to food and tools and farming equipment that were made by local tradesmen. Purchases were limited to fabrics, dishes and other small things. Colonists tried (as well as they could) to bring sufficient supplies of everything necessary, so that trips were made to market in the nearest town only once a year. The Czech villages lay isolated in the mountains, the roads were not in good repair, and this hampered contact with the rest of the vicinity. The roads were cared for by the military command, but the distance from thickly settled areas was and still is a hindrance. Besides farming, the Czech colonists turned to raising domestic animals, horses for the plow, and cattle for milk and meat. Any excess cream, butter, cottage cheese and eggs were desired products in the markets, and Czech "butter maids" were known for quality and cleanliness. Later, the Czech women from the village of Sumice were the first to buy up milk from Wallachian neighbors that they cleaned and worked. From Sumice they walked for four hours along the road to the train, and to reach the market in large cities took three or even four days.(18) The money they earned was often the only source from which a woman bought fabrics for clothing and shoes for the whole family. Men went into the woods for seasonal work, and some made shingles, brooms, baskets and wooden articles. Near the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century near the Czech settlements of Eibenthal and Biger, anthracite mines opened, so most men from those settlements became iron ore miners, while women with children and older parents did the farming. In some villages they earned extra by burning and selling lime. Older girls from some villages worked in town as servants. In this way they earned their dowry, but mainly they learned to cook, how to manage a household and how to care for children. Because of their cleanliness and industriousness they were sought out and paid

well. But in spite of these financial benefits, farming and cattle were still the primary source of income. The other work only improved a family's situation.

The first buildings which the colonists began building were their own residences. After sod and bermed huts there were small wooden cottages of oak or huts of twigs tied together and covered with mud and roofed with straw or reeds with one small window. Because families grew, the huts became inadequate, sometimes damaged by fire or earthquake, so larger homes were built. In some villages, with the help of all the relatives, sod was mixed with weeds which was packed in between strong boards, doors and windows were cut out, and the rafters were covered with shingles, thatch, and later even tiles. That type of home was in three parts with a living room, chamber and stable. Later the stables were built apart from the house and the original stable became another living room with a corner kitchen, and the original living room became a parlor.(19) In other villages, homes were built of so-called "soft stone" --fufaceous limestone, which was cut with a saw into squares. The farm buildings, stables, sheds, and barns were of wood, usually covered with thatch and later with shingles. Among the preserved buildings today the oldest are the individual homes, the "guard house", schools and churches.

Even though the military command had promised the colonists Czech teachers and a priest, in most settlements they had to wait for them almost 30 years. At first teaching was done by the older or most capable men, who taught in their homes, and later by low-ranking army musicians who had served their time in Caransebeş. Not until around 1850 did regular teaching in schools begin,(20) when school buildings were built with apartments for teachers. In the 1850's the first diplomaed teacher from Bohemia arrived,(21) and around that same time the first stone churches and parsonages (usually replacing wooden chapels) were built, and spiritual leaders arrived.(22) The military command kept its promises, and in all towns they gave material for the building of schools and chapels or even a town hall, while the villagers took charge of the labor. Furnishings for the church were provided in part by the military command, the church offices, patrons, and even by gifts from Bohemia. The Czech colonists were Roman Catholics except for thirty families of Evangelicals, who settled in the town [M.C. village] of Svata Helena. Of them, a portion was Nazarenes and a larger portion was Baptists. The existence of four religions in one village led to diversity and a special standing of this religiously heterogeneous locality amongst the other Czech villages, which remained religiously pure. In the Banat, which was ethnically heterogeneous, the predominant religion was orthodox (amongst Serbs and Wallachians), with some Catholics (Germans), and Jews. As subsequently shown, religion played a huge role in helping the Czech settlements to adapt and become emancipated.

Because the leaders of the military frontier knew that Czechs would willingly stay in inhospitable conditions as long as they have their religion and their schools, they supported various churches and schools, and it must be said that qualified people cared for the school and religious training. The memory of the teachers and priests lives in the thoughts of the people to this day, and some of them exerted maximal efforts to elevate the Czech minority.(23)

The Czech inhabitants of the Banat found themselves in a worse situation after the disbanding of the military frontier when the entire region became part of the Hungarian Empire. The villagers themselves maintained schools that had been public. After the issuance of the Apponyi Law [M.C. in 1907], the schools became state regulated, and in some places Hungarian teachers installed. Similarly, priests were replaced by Hungarian ones, and in most places Czech was not taught. Magyarization increased, and reached it's peak in 1910 when the Czech language was designated as only an auxiliary language, and children were taught only in Hungarian. Attempts at denationalization met with strong resistance, and the Czech language remained only in families where it was passed from generation to generation. Hungarian dominance was brought to an end in 1920 by the Treaty of Trianon, which divided the Banat between Romania and Jugoslavia.

The change of administration barely touched the Czechs. The villages were given Hungarian names,(24) children were taught in Hungarian, chronicles and registers were maintained in Hungarian, but the people continued their various activities, and their first concern was working and caring for their crops. Population growth in villages began to create a shortage of land. Drudgery and overpopulation of the villages did not exactly lead to contentment, and in the 1890's people began leaving the villages. Some left for nearby Romanian villages,(25) some went to Serbia,(26) Bulgaria(27) and also to America.(28) This outflow of inhabitants improved the situations of the remaining Czechs, and eventually solved the problem of overpopulation.(29)

Even when the Czech villagers lived their lives without much contact with other ethnic groups in the area, it cannot be said that they had no contact with their own (i.e. with Czechs). At the time the military frontier existed, Banat and Czechs were part of the same monarchy, which had very efficient military and church administrations. Therefore requests of the military administration reached the proper places in Bohemia. It was first of all the way to obtain priests and diplomaed teachers. At the time of building schools and churches in individual villages, help came from Bohemia, whether from individuals or organizations.(30)

Widespread public information about the lives of the Czech colonists apparently appeared for the first time in 1855 in Prague newspapers,(31) and further mention is already found in history books or articles,(32) or books of travels.(33) We know from individual accounts that at the turn of the century Czech goods appeared in some Czech villages, but it was usually something exceptional ordered for an "enlightened" teacher.(34) After the Banat became part of the Hungarian monarchy, Czech villages lay under Hungarian administration which was hostile to the Czech minority. Contact with the old country by the Banat Czech villagers was not possible until

the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the first photographs were published (35) and also excellent articles by Jan Auerhan which also contained the first statistical and demographic data.(36)

The majority of news brought, besides historical and statistical data and reports, news of the way of life and traditional customs which showed the typical Czech nature: "Under the Hungarian government, where people were overcome by so many cruel oppressions, they preserved to this day, if not entirely, then at least significantly, the nature of their native happiness and national life."(37) The first thing that captivated everyone in the Czech villages was the traditional women's way of dress, typical of an individual Czech Banat village, and completely different from the dress of the Wallachians or Serbs. The dress even in an individual village preserved the regional elements of Czech dress of the first colonists. From their Wallachian neighbors they took the style of shoes, winter short fur vests and men's winter caps, in short, that which they were forced objectively to adapt. Similarly, food, which basically comes out of a traditional Czech kitchen, took on only those changes that were objectively necessary. That was, above all, the use of corn, eating of which was unknown to the first colonists. Likewise, in the interior of a house and in furniture they kept to the Czech origins. Czech village joiners made furniture and furnishings, and dishes and small utensils (except for wooden manufactured house wares) were bought in markets.

Czechs also copied methods of farming, thrift, growing and agrotechnical practices from people of other ethnic derivation in the area. Only in the time of colonization did they bring knowledge that, compared to the Wallachian and Serb ways, was on a higher level. An even greater difference came at the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century when above everything else diplomaed teachers brought into the Banat region the newest knowledge of thrift, growing and agrotechnology. They also brought basic information about fruit growing and beekeeping, which was in the Banat almost unknown [M.C. false!]. In some instances the Wallachian farmers accepted the competence and the practices of the Czechs, but because their contacts were irregular, this was not of significant influence.

There was not frequent contact even between individual Czech villages. Some names of colonists indicate that apparently in the first years there was definitely intermarriage with the local inhabitants,(38) but the appearance of the same names in different Czech villages could be partly initial intermarriage, or later migration of entire families. In the sources there is no mention of marriages between separate Czech villages; on the contrary, their strict endogamy is always emphasized. From field studies we know, however, that marriage between villages occurred, but only in exceptional instances, for example with widowers, widows, physically handicapped, etc., for whom there was not a suitable partner in his own village. These instances were isolated, and villages remained closed off. The life of an individual or an entire community was determined by the rhythm of farm work, holidays, and church and family celebrations. All customs and practices were characteristically Czech, and the community took them as manifestations of ethnic relevance which are to be regarded as tradition and which must be strictly observed. In the days of increasing Magyarization they served as symbols of Czechness and defense against oppression. Similarly, also the words and music of folklore retained Czech features. The returning men from Balkan wars enriched folklore with military songs and the telling of military events. The repertoire widened, but never to the detriment of Czech tradition. On the contrary, Czech customs and ceremonies helped the people resist the Hungarians and later the Romanians.

A brief survey gives a sketch of life in Czech villages from colonization until after the beginning of the twentieth century in the southern Banat.

Social migration in the framework of the Hungarian monarchy brought the poor and middle class village inhabitants into the alliance of the so-called military frontier. Apparently not one of the people conceived of the situation in which he with his family or he himself would find himself. The colonists came to uninhabited regions with dense virgin forests which were to serve as a frontier against the possibility of danger from the Turks.(39) People, however, in order to survive, had to adapt and change their habits and attitudes.

Objectively, among the possible reasons for changes in some aspects of ethnicity, first would be natural and climatic conditions. It was necessary to build various buildings out of available materials, even when the sources of the time emphasized certain "Czech nature" of a village, which apparently consisted of spacing out buildings, and general maintenance and cleanliness. Natural and climatic conditions influenced flora and fauna that differed somewhat from Czech environment. Colonists had to learn to deal with wild animals, because they threatened not only their crops but also their lives. The colonists had to learn how to use and grow the local plant life, especially corn and other vegetables. This at the same time had an influence on their food supply, which had to do with available raw materials. Likewise, the different climate forced the colonists to adapt even their clothing. The Banat has above all much higher summer and lower winter temperatures than the Czechs were accustomed to. Also precipitation is far more frequent and substantial. In the spring and fall there are strong winds. They come in seven - to ten - day cycles, which, after a few days, die down and then repeat throughout spring and fall, and in strength they resemble gales. They tear off roofs, break trees, throw around anything that is not fastened down, and prevent people from being outdoors, because the winds raise dust, scatter water and denude trees of leaves. That was an entirely new phenomenon for Czechs, and before they realized its course and regularity, it did a lot of damage. In clothing and footwear the colonists to this day adapted only to objective conditions. They kept their same daily clothes and to this day their regional distinctiveness. Small influences had to be let go in small domestic matters because as soon as people began purchasing, they were limited by what was available in the market. Moreover, reports of the first travelers and demographers emphasize the typical Czech way of life of farmers and tradesmen in all respects. The Sunday components of their lives were and are governed by the calendar or by family events, which were consistent with their Czech nature, under laid with Czech songs, dance and additionally expressed folkloric creations. In the mainly

Czech villages there were also Czech choruses that presented Czech songs and dance even in other ethnic surroundings.

As regards **language**, even that prevailed with regional variations and individualities. The specialized nomenclature for various types of utensils and terminology pertaining to trades was preserved in German or in Germanized Czech expressions, but this did not extend to Hungarian, Romanian or Serbian influences. Girls went into town to work as servants, and they learned another language, as did men when they went into military service, but at home in the Czech villages, the Czech language was retained. Certainly a role was played by schools and churches, where in the era of the military frontier Czech was used exclusively, whereas in official matters German was used, which the Czechs from the old country were accustomed to.

**Ethnic awareness** apparently at first did not play a large role. The colonists were aware of their own ethnic singularity, but the difficult living conditions did not enable them to reflect on their own uniqueness and compare their situation as individual Banat ethnics. Their consciousness of their own ethnic relevance extended apparently to contacts with local inhabitants who lived in comparatively worse living conditions and on a lower social level. The building of tidy villages, establishing school attendance, regular church services or even just piousness, successful agriculture and sale of excess products in the market—all of these contributed to a feeling of national pride. The Czechs were indisputably better farmers and custodians, and local inhabitants learned a lot from them. Many Czech customs and ceremonies had distinctive character that set the Czechs apart. Czechs were conscious of their changing status (even though they were often poorer than their Serb or Wallachian neighbors) and clung to their principles and outwardly declared their ethnic relevance, whether it was their language, clothes or customs, because accepting foreign customs would in their opinions lower them to the level of Wallachians. Retained ways of life and traditional culture helped emancipate the group. When at the end of the century there was oppression of nationalities by the state, the Czech villages were so strongly aware that they upheld tradition, which had original distinctive character, which they held fast to this defense against the Hungarians.

#### Endnotes:

\* the article was first published in "Češi v cizine", no. 8, Praha, 1995; translated into English by Karleen Chott Sheppard and republished in "Nase rodina", volume 12, number 1/March 2000.

"Nase rodina" (Our Family) is published quarterly by the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI).

- 1) František Vaniček, Specialgeschichte der Militargrenze aus Originalquellen und Quellenwerkengeschopft, Wien, 1875.
- 2) Rudolf Urban, Čechoslováci v Rumunsku, Bukurest, 19??.
- 3) Karl Freiherrn von Czoernig, Ethnographie der Oesterreichischen Monarchie, Wien, 1855.
- 4) Jindřich Schlogi, Dějiny českých osad v rumunském Banátě. Zvl. otisk ze sborníku naše zahraničí, 1925, p. 5.  
Jan Auerhan, Čechoslováci v Jugoslávii, v Rumunsku, v Madarsku a v Bulharsku, Praha, 1921, p. 64-65.  
Historia Domus. Weitzenried 1853. Deposited in the Gernik / Gárnice parish.  
František Karas, Československá větev, zapomenutá nebem i zemi. I. Čechové v Rumunsku, Praha, 1937, p. 33-34.
- 5) R. Urban, p. 7.
- 6) J. Schlogi, p. 14.
- 7) Kamil Krofta, Dějiny selského stavu, Praha, 1949, p. 365-377.
- 8) Historia Domus, Weitzenried 1853. Memorial book of the Gernik parish, written by P. František Unzeitig. Part I. Establishment of the Czech colony in the Banat-military frontier. Handwritten, deposited in the Gernik parish. Czech translation from German and Hungarian original by P. Václav Masek.
- 9) Peter Grassl, Geschichte der Deutsch-Bomnischen Ansiedlungen im Banat, Prag, 1904.
- 10) Karl Freiherrn von Czoernig, p. 108.
- 11) J. Schlogl, p. 16-18.
- 12) Oszkár Jászi, Česká osada v bývalém Sedmihradsku. Naše zahraničí, 1923-'24, p. 128-131.  
Josef Hříbek, Z pamětní knihy Čechů v Csehfalvě (Ablianu). Naše zahraničí 1922-'23, p. 21-24.  
Jan Auerhan, Z pamětní knihy Čechů v Krušici (v bývalých jižních Uhrách). Národopisný věstník československý, 1911/VI, p. 122-123.
- 13) F. Karas, p. 34.
- 14) R. Urban, p. 13-14.
- 15) Gernická kronika Historia Domus recounts the occasion when Gernik citizen Pesic received land on which there stood a Wallachian cottage, which its owners had had to give up. Two Wallachians from the distressed family attacked Pesic and wanted to kill him, but his family pursued and prosecuted them. The court made them an example to others by publicly hanging them.
- 16) Of the required twelve years, four had to be served with the regiment and after that every year 2-3 months on border duty in one of the small forts on the Danube. J- Schlogl, p. 34.
- 17) Historia Domus, p. 17.
- 18) F. Karas, p. 13-14.
- 19) J. Hříbek, p 21-24. F. Karas, p. 34-35.
- 20) Regular teaching in schools began in the following towns:  
Eibenthal 1848

Rovensko	1850
Svatá Helena and Gemik	1851
Biger	1852
Šumice	1857

Teaching in the Evangelical and Reformed school in Svata Helena 1855-'56.

**21) First diplomaed teachers in Czech villages:**

Svata Helená - Antonín Holeček	1854
Rovensko - Matěj Hájek	1854
Gemik - Vincenc Zamoutil	1857
Biger - Adam Mleziva	1865
Eibenthal - Josef Hájek	?
Šumice - Josef Březina	1878

**22) Chapels and [M.C. Roman Catholic] churches in Czech villages:**

Rovensko - chapel of Sv. Martin	1824
Biger - chapel of Sv. Vaclav	1824
Šumice - chapel of Sv. Anna	1828
Eibenthal - wooden church	1847
Svata Helená - chapel of Sv. Helena	1852
Gemik - church of Sv. Jan Nepomuk	1858
Rovensko - chapel of Immaculate Conception of Virgin Mary	1863
Berzasca - church of Nativity of Virgin Mary	1872
Biger - church of Most Holy Trinity	1878
Svatá Helena - church of Sv. Helena	1879
Svatá Helena - Evangelical church	1887
Šumice - church of Sv. Anna	1887-'88
Eibenthal - church of Sv. Jan Nepomuk	1922
Rovensko - church of Virgin Mary	1923

**23) An outstanding personality was the first Catholic priest in Gemik, Father František Unzeitig of Česká Třebová, who served during the years 1850-'73 and is buried in Gemik. Another leader was teacher Jindřich Schlogl from Velká Řetová (Řetová) near Usti nad Orlicí, who taught for 39 years in Svata Helena and is buried there. It was he who besides teaching helped survey land, photographed, taught fruit growing and beekeeping. From Bohemia he ordered merchandise and new varieties of cultivars and innovations for farming. He was known throughout the Banat by the nickname "reformer".**

**24) Svata Helena - Dunaszentilona**

Gemik - Szörényibúzás
Rovensko - Almásróna
Šumice - Cseherdős
Eibenthal - Tiszafa

Schnellersruhe - Biger (previously used as a colloquial name)

**25) For instance, Berzasca, Liubcova, Orșova, Zlatița, Mercina, et al.**

**26) The first departures were from Gemik in 1852. Historia Domus.**

**27) In 1897 thirteen Evangelical families left Svata Helena for Bulgaria, where they settled in the town of Sasek. The local Bulgars, however, protested that the Czechs were usurping their land, so the government, under their threats and pressure, gave new land to the Czechs, where they established the town of Vojvodovo.**

Vladimír Mičan, *Za chlebem vezdejším*, Brno, 1931.

J. Auerhan, *Čechoslováci v Jugoslávii, v Rumunsku . . .*, c.d., p. 92-96.

František Štědransk, *Zpráva o situaci Čechů a Slováků a o provolení přesídlovací akce*, Oradea, 1947, mimeographed, p. 67.

**28) Emigrants went first to Argentina. F. Štědransk.**

**29) Number of inhabitants in individual villages and in individual years:**

Town / Year	1830	1854	1869	1880	1890	1894	1900	1910
Svatá Helena	338	313	469	461	757	627	766	811
Gemik	469	564	820	913	1029	1290	1155	1048
Rovensko	237	216	321	410	418	460	386	355
Eibenthal	356	?	469	552	597	?	720	848
Šumice	123	?	202	263	314	?	376	423
Biger	266	215	225	238	282	302	325	377
Berzasca	settled from Gemik and Rovensko				265			
Orsova	settled from Ogradena and Eibenthal				246			
Zlatita	settled from Gemik, Svata Helena and Sumice				122	---		
Nova Ogradena	186	?	151	145	189	?	259	237

F. Štědransk.

Jan Auerhan, České osady v bývalých jižních Uhrách, Pokroková revue, 1908/IV.

30) Historia Domus states concrete dates in the chapter Stavba gernické fary and Dobrodinci a jejich dary.

31) Katolická misí ve Vojenské hranici, Pražské noviny 1855, number 249.

České osady ve Vojenské hranici, Pražské noviny 1857, number 287.

České osady ve Vojenské hranici, Pražské noviny 1858, number 57.

32) Karl Freiherrn von Czoemig, F. Vaníček, Stanislav Klima, České osady dolnouherské, Český lid 1899, p. 22-28. Article contains photographs by Jindřich Schlogl.

33) Josef Kořenský, Na Dunaji, Pokrok, 1885, number 248.

34) For instance Jindřich Schlogl, teacher in Svatá Helena who negotiated acquisition of the Bohemian plow and iron plows from Bohemia.

35) Josef Hříbek, České osady v Dolních Uhrách. Pražský ilustrovaný kurýr 1913, numbers 175, 178; 1914, numbers 43, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52 (including 14 photographs).

36) Jan Auerhan, České osady v bývalých jižních Uhrách, identical to České osady v bývalých jižních Uhrách dle sčítání z roku 1910, Pokroková Revue, 1914.

37) Josef Hříbek, Z českých osad v Dolních Uhrách, Pražský ilustrovaný Kurýr, number 48.

38) Some sources state that it is hard to know whether German names of Czech inhabitants in Banat villages (such as Roth, Seidel, Kunz, Schweiner, Glaser, Merhaut, Filander and others) originate from Germans who left Bohemia together with Bohemians, or whether they are the consequence of mixing with Germans who already lived in the Banat. We can compare German names with the list of the first German colonists from Bohemia published in a book by P. Grassel, where he gives only some names of the founders of the villages of Weidenthal, Wolfsberg and Lindenfeld, but all other above mentioned names are missing from the list. If we look, however, into the record of the inhabitants of the villages of Gemik, Rovensko and Biger, according to the Gemik church registers from the years 1851-'53, which are deposited in Gemik, all the German names are here recorded even with the birth places in Bohemia. We are not dealing here with Germans, not with the result of Czech-German mixing, but with Czechs with German names.

39) The Banat was originally part of the Hungarian empire. In 1552 [M.C. only the Banat's plain] it was captured by the Turks and during their authority it was the scene of continuous bloody battles, which left the formerly fertile region totally ruined. The Karlovic Peace of 1699 gained back for Austria, among other regions, Croatia, the Ugric region, part of the Banat [M.C. false!] and the principality of Semihradec. Leopold I began colonizing the desolate regions; first the Serbian Orthodox families (37.000), and the emperor assured the colonists of religious freedom and autonomy by his own patents, and in 1702 a military administration was established in a part of the Banat [M.C. false!]. In the years 1716-'18 more Austrian-Turkish wars broke out, which brought an end to the Passarowitz Peace. All of the Banat fell to Austria, also Belgrade and a portion of Serbia. In these regions a so-called military frontier was established, which governed the captured territory. On the frontiers, it built regularly spaced out little forts called cordons, and in the villages the custodians were in local homes, so called "guard houses", small military detachments, which watched over the town and the border. Subsequent Austrian Emperors continued with the settlement of the desolate region, and then Emperor Josef II divided the Banat into 3 districts [M.C. in fact, the 3 counties were set up already in 1779 by Maria Theresa] which, without regard for previous privileges, he made subordinate to the central political administration of the Hungarian empire. In 1848 the Banat Serbs rose up against the Hungarians, and in November of 1849 the Banat was torn away from the Hungarian region, and as a new Austrian crown land it was placed under the Austrian empire. This situation lasted until 1867 when the Austro-Hungarian [M.C. should be Austro-Serbian] creation was returned to Hungary. On November 1, 1877 [M.C. the military border from the south of Banat was abolished on 8.06.1871], the military frontier was definitively abolished and its administrative centers and territories were subordinate to the Hungarian empire civil administration.

**\*\* My Comments:** the author has some errors in his article regarding well-known historical facts. Banat remained under Turkish rule up to the Peace Treaty signed at Passarowitz on 21.07.1718. There were no ruling or colonization of the Habsburg authorities on/in Banat before the autumn of 1716 when Timișoara was conquered from the Turks.

The rest of the errors were corrected on spot using [M.C. ...].

Also, I felt the need to give, in the same manner, some more info, mainly dates, for a correct understanding of the text.