

A Visit to Bohemia

Sun 8/13/00

Dear Boh-Morites,

I have recently returned from a very interesting genealogical journey of discovery to my family's ancestral shtetls in the South and West Bohemia regions of the Czech Republic.

I traveled with the film production company that the Ellis Island Museum hired to make short documentary films on the major ethnic groups who immigrated to America. My researcher, Julius Muller of Prague, well-known to many of you, arranged for us to meet with some very interesting people and set up filming arrangements at the Archives in Prague.

Achab Haidler joined us in the village of Ckyne (Ch keen YAH) in South Bohemia to interpret the inscriptions on the gravestones in the cemetery.

We also met with and interviewed an elderly woman who recalls the day remaining Jews of Ckyne were deported and still remembers all the family names.

The filming went very well despite the showery weather we were plagued with, and the story of my family became of less importance as the story unfolded of two non-Jews who have dedicated their time and energy to resurrecting and preserving the Jewish heritage of Bohemia in this small town. Professor Jan Podlesak deserves our praise and thanks for his tireless work, restoring Ckyne's cemetery and turning the Chevra Kadusha house into a memorial to the Jews from Ckyne who died in the concentration camps. He and a few colleagues have rebuilt the wall around the cemetery, installed a wooden fence above the upper boundary, reset every gravestone and restored the burial house. One cannot appreciate his work until one sees a neglected Jewish cemetery such as the one visited in Telice in West Bohemia.

Equally deserving of our praise is Ms. Jindra Bromova who is spearheading the restoration program for the Ckyne synagogue, a mammoth task. They have been able to reroof the building to protect the interior from further deterioration. The interior has been gutted and needs complete restoration. This task will cost in the neighborhood of \$300,000. There are only two synagogues in all of South Bohemia still owned by the Jews. Bromova and Podlesak wish to turn this synagogue into a museum of Jewish culture. Podlesak has a portion of the original torah, and his goal is to return it to the tabernacle from which it came. A year or two ago a concert was held in the temple (see attached picture) with 140 people in attendance for the purpose of raising awareness and monies for the synagogue's restoration.

A dedication ceremony was also held at the renovated burial house to remember the Jewish citizens from Ckyne and Vimperk who perished in the Holocaust.

Achab Haidler is a national treasure. He reads the inscriptions with his fingers as well as his eyes. The most moving moment for me was his reading of the Hebrew inscription on my gg grandfather's gravestone amidst the sound of falling raindrops. He translated the Hebrew into Czech and Julius repeated in English, the Old Testament passage mentioning "...tears falling...." Achab transcribed the entire cemetery in only two days. We also visited Telice's cemetery, looking for my ancestors, (we found two), and were dismayed by its poor condition. Achab's wish to complete all the cemeteries in Bohemia and Moravia is impossible for one person to accomplish, but it is an important goal for our group to contemplate.

My research together with Julius' uncovered another generation of my family, a pleasant reward for all our work. I can now tie in almost all my WUDL family back to 1733.

We visited the small village of Darmsyl near Telice in the hope of finding where the small community of Jews, including my family, had once lived. We had an 1837 land survey map, but could not locate where the

"ghetto" had been. We asked the villagers if they knew, and we were directed to an amateur historian who offered to take us to the place. It was through a fence, across private property, on the edge of the village near a small stream. All that is left is a mound of rubble, roofing tiles and foundation stones of very small dwellings. I tried to imagine my gggg grandfather Moses WUDL eking out a living for his family through trade, paying 300% more taxes than his Christian neighbors while being restricted in the manners and ways that all Jews suffered under the Hapsburg Empire at this time. It could not have been very easy for our ancestors to survive, but somehow they did.

I met Wolf-Erich ECKSTEIN in a most unusual way at the Archives. Julius and I were reviewing the day's research and I was saying, "...so Esther WUDL married an ECKSTEIN..." and a voice from the table in front of us said, "...ECKSTEIN, I'm ECKSTEIN"! Wolf had a laptop with his genealogical database and within we found Esther WUDL! We have not proven the exact connection, but it made for a dramatic moment. We also found proof that Barbara DOLEZAL, Phil LEDERER and I had gg grandmothers that were sisters from Ckyne; to simplify, we share the same ggg grandparents and are fourth cousins!



Concert at Ckyne Synagogue

A visit to the Czech Republic would have been incomplete without a stay in Prague including a four-hour guided tour of the old Jewish quarter, all in all a fascinating excursion. I took a number of slides of tombstones in Ckyne and Telice, the lovely countryside, the synagogue and the local villages. I hope to add some of these images to our website soon.

If it is within your means to travel to your ancestral home, I highly recommend it, for it will bring you ever closer to your ancestors who began your life's journey.

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