



CZECH SACRED PLACES IN TEXAS AS THE KEY ELEMENT FOR PRESERVING CZECH IDENTITY

The process of Czech and Moravian immigration to Texas is a well-known phenomenon and parts of it have been already researched. However, there are still themes to be explored and one of them is the church as an immigration actor.¹ The author of this paper agrees with Cuamea Velázquez, that immigration needs to be studied as a complex phenomenon. Felipe Cuamea Velázquez endorses merging social and migration network approaches and, at the same time, addresses the institutional (in this case religious) background (2000: 157–163). Another useful theory is Raymond Breton’s “institutional completeness” which analyses and compares the rate of assimilation into the host country with other nationalities (or spatial differences of one nationality) and in what way they preserved or recreated their ethnocultural identity (1964: 193–205). Based on these theories we can propose a hypothesis that the Czech Texans preserved their identity longer than other Czechs in the Americas and it was heavily influenced by their perception of sacred places. In part because of their religious importance, but also because the places served as sites of cultural heritage and link to their homeland. The research aim here is threefold. First, to explain

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the historical dimension of the religious connection between the Czech and Moravian immigrants in Texas with their native land. Second, to describe the sacred places of the immigrants, how they were built, what role they played in their everyday life, and how they established a bond with their country of origin. Third, what importance did the sacred places of the Czechs and Moravians have in preserving their language and cultural identity?

The conceptual framework of this contribution needs to define a sacred place in the Czech Texan context. Traditionally, the term was and still is used in a principally religious or spiritual sense. Jonathan Z. Smith compares a sacred place to a “focusing lens” thanks to which the objects and rituals gain religious importance (1982: 53–54). Similarly, and more contemporarily, Florin George Calian presents it as a place where the devotee can access God or an area for the affirmation of religious identity (2021: 139). However, this limiting view has been challenged by some scholars, and their definition fits more adequately the Czech Texan case. Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide emphasizes the cultural role of a sacred place: “Cultural perceptions of sacred landscapes have shaped the ways in which human beings have organized their lives and settlements. Human activity usually takes place in close proximity to areas in the landscape that are ‘set apart’ as sacred” (2013: 4). Other authors do not define sacred places only as religious sites. They could play a symbolic role and support nationalism or patriotism (Ben-Israel 1998: 283). They are also fundamental for ethnic groups, their identity, their inherent system of values, or their cultural heritage (Veikko Anttonen 2013: 13).

This topic has not received proper attention from historians, largely because it requires studying sources on both sides of the Atlantic. Some works touch on the topic of religion among the Czech Texans, but they usually use a descriptive and positivist approach (Naše dějiny 1939), or the authors just use religion as one of many traits of the Czechs (e.g. Machann and Mendl 2001; Stasney 1938; Eckertová 2003; Hannan 1996). This contribution tries to build on their work but as it uses the approach of microhistory, it demands the use of various and fragmented sources. There are several definitions. The author understands it as detective

research that uses a microscope rather than a telescope (Magnússon and Szijártó 2013), focusing on marginalized groups that have not received proper attention from the “big narratives” (Ginzburg et al. 1993: 16).

This article is based on archival material from Austria² and the Czech Republic, principally the collections of the religious organizations that supported the immigrants in Texas, such as the Leopoldine Society. The paper also makes use of published contemporary personal memoirs and secondary literature. The content and discourse of these sources will be critically analyzed to answer the research questions and confirm or refute the hypothesis.

CREATING THE BOND

Czech³ immigration to Texas had already begun before 1848 but we know only individuals like Antonín Michal Dignowity, from that era. The mass movement started only after the revolutionary year that abolished the institution of *corvée* and thus allowed the people to move more freely, also abroad. In the 1850s, we notice the first major group of Czechs coming to Texas (Polišenský 1996: 23–30). The migration process was stalled by the American Civil War and the number of Czechs in Texas was 781, in 1870 (Kownslar 2004: 134). However, we can assume that many others declared they came from Austria or were registered as Austrians by the American officials. Czech immigration to Texas flourished after the Civil War and in subsequent decades. The Lone Star State needed manpower, especially for its cotton fields because many of the former slaves moved to the northern states of the Union (Konecny and Machann 1993: 136). The demand for cotton on the world market opened Texas to further immigration and the state government promoted it. Official brochures, advertisements, and pamphlets appeared in Europe to attract migration, and some were even

2. The reference here is to the present Republic of Austria. All the rest are attributed to the Habsburg Empire in the nineteenth century.

3. The term Czechs we use in a contemporary sense to facilitate reading includes Czechs (Bohemians), Moravians, and Czech-speaking Silesians. However, it is essential to note that eighty percent of the Czech Texans originated from Moravia (Dongres 1923: 270).

translated into Czech like the famous *Texas, co cíl do stěhování* (“Texas as an immigrant destination”) (Siemering 1882). Agents of the shipping companies also tried to attract the Czechs to move but most important, according to scholars like František Kutnar were letters from a small group of expatriates already established in Texas. We cannot consider them just as personal or familiar items because they were read publicly on town squares, at social gatherings, or in pubs. They were so popular that some even aroused the suspicion that shipping company agents wrote them by themselves (Kutnar 1964: 22–26). Yet, there was no need to sugarcoat the conditions in Texas after the American Civil War. After the first precarious years (usually five to ten), the vast majority of Czechs could buy their own land, start planting cotton and eventually became wealthier than their compatriots in Europe. The Czech immigrants in Texas present, in their majority, a unique success story, especially when we compare them with Czechs in Russia, Germany, or other rural states in the US (compare with Vaculík 2009). This explains why their numbers grew exponentially until the First World War. In 1932 Henry R. Maresh, the Texan historian of Czech ancestry, estimated the Czech population in the state between 350,000 and 500,000 inhabitants (Maresh and Hudson 1934: XI).

The growing number of Czechs in Texas, and other European immigrants for that matter, presented several challenges for them and local institutions. Religious matters were one of the most pressing, or, to be precise, the lack of them. In 1850, the bishop of Galveston, Jean-Marie Odin, complained that he had only fourteen priests in his whole diocese (which included the territory of New Mexico) (Letter from Gottfried Menzel to Franz Petters 1850: 87). Another problem was the language barrier. Only some parsons spoke basic German and none spoke Czech. Odin decided to visit Europe, seeking help to improve the situation in his diocese. Many of his believers were from Austria so he went to Vienna where he obtained financial aid from the Leopoldine Society (Leopoldinen-Stiftung) (Blied 1944: 146). Odin’s sojourn in Austria was crucial in establishing religious ties between the immigrants in Texas and their homeland. It is important to note that only the spiritual organizations offered any support to their compatriots in Texas.

The Austrian and, since 1918, the Czechoslovak, governments had little interest in their former citizens and the organizations they established were, like the Czechoslovak Foreign Institute in 1928, for gathering statistical data and information rather than for supporting the migrants (Dubovický 1996: 229–247).

The Czech Texans were predominantly Catholic,⁴ they appreciated the support of their organizations, and it was one of the reasons why religion became the amalgam of their society. The Leopoldine Society⁵ played an important role in this process. It was established officially in 1829 in Vienna on the model of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, founded in Lyon, France, in 1822, by Pauline Jaricot. It was never as successful as its French counterpart, but it had a significant impact in Texas (Ústav Leopoldinský 1853: 481–482), also in the promotion of the Americas in Austria thanks to the annual publication of *Berichte* [Reports] *der Leopoldinen-Stiftung im Kaiserthume Oesterreich* (Blied 1944: 20–24). The name referred to the patron saint of Austria, St. Leopold and, in the beginning, the society had three aims: to promote greater Catholic missionary efficiency in America; to participate in the edification of believers for the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world; to be a remembrance to Leopoldine, Archduchess of Austria and late empress of Brazil, who died in America (Kummer 1966: 12). Nevertheless, the goals changed over time, especially when the number of Catholic immigrants from Austria grew in the United States. The society focused their missionary activities on them and limited the former goal of converting the indigenous population to faith.

We can demonstrate the *modus operandi* of the society in Texas in two cases. In 1849, Gottfried Menzel (Bohumír Menzl in some sources) came to Galveston. He was a priest in Nové Město pod Smrkem (Neustadt), who decided to visit Texas for several reasons. First, as a natural scientist, he wanted to explore the state. Second, he served as a guide to some families from Bohemia

4. The discussion on the more accurate estimates of the Catholics, Protestants, and Freethinkers in Texas is present in section three of this article.

5. The full title was *Leopoldinen-Stiftung für das Kaiserreich Österreich zur Unterstützung der amerikanischen Missionen* (Leopoldine Society for the Austrian Empire to support the American Missions) (Thauren 1940: 58).

(Smith 1988: 13). Third, he was tasked by bishop Odin to attend to the German Catholics in Fredericksburg and Neu Braunfels because they did not have a parson who could speak German properly.⁶ It is probable that Menzel did not plan to perform missionary work in Texas but was convinced by Odin who took the opportunity and sent him to his parishioners. From his personal collection, we can observe that his passport was valid for just three years⁷ and indeed Menzel left the United States in 1851. In one of his reports, he boasted of his work by stating that none of his Catholic parishioners converted to Protestant churches. Similarly, he indicated that hard work, the same cultural and linguistic background, and the creation of sacred places helped the immigrants:

On April 20 [1850], I traveled to Friedrichsburg [Fredericksburg] eighty miles from Braunfels and I spent two months there. The Catholic parish has 40 families and has started to build a church, which will be finished soon. I liked the inhabitants here more: there is a great religious spirit among the Catholics. On Saturday, before the Pentecost, I erected, on a nearby steep hill, an impressive looking cross from a huge oak trunk. This symbol of redemption was also admired by the Protestants. ("Katolická missi" 1851: 1)

Menzel's sojourn in Texas was a brief one but it helped establish a pattern that would be followed in later years. In 1872, Josef Chromčík came to Texas thanks to the support of Leopoldine Society and became a priest in Fayetteville (Kummer 1966: 167). Two years earlier, dozens of parishioners from the Moravian villages of Lichnov and Bordovice decided to leave for Texas. In their letters home they invited Chromčík to come to them (Houšť 1890: 415–416). He indeed came and unlike Menzel stayed until his death in 1910, which is one of the reasons why he is well remembered:

His coming was always welcomed by the Czechs of the area, who gathered in a home or school or other meeting place for divine services. He would hear their confessions, offer Mass, give Communion, officiate at their marriages, baptize their children, visit and anoint their

6. Státní okresní archiv Liberec, collection Gottfried Menzel NAD 1321, Begleitbrief (accompanying letter) from Bishop of Galveston Jean-Marie Odin, 4 December 1849.

7. Státní okresní archiv Liberec, collection Gottfried Menzel NAD 1321, Reisepass of Gottfried Menzel, 26 April 1849.

sick, and give religious instruction to their children as well as preach to the adults and on occasion bury their dead. (Mořkovský 1979: 78)

His laborious personality, organizational skills, and his overall impact earned him the title of the first Czech Catholic priest in Texas. In 1875, he built a school in Fayetteville where he taught for fifteen years, he constructed a new parsonage there, in 1892 (Habenicht 1910: 88). However, his most important deed was the communication with the Leopoldine Society. Already since 1878, he asked for more Czech priests to come to Texas (“Berichte des hochwürdigen Herrn Joseph Chromcik” 1878: 60), something the society supported in 1887 and 1888 when it covered the travel expenses of Václav Chlapík and Karel Preis, who became parsons in Frelsburg and Ellinger, respectively (Kummer 1966: 169). We also have evidence that he asked for material support for the Fayetteville school and his spiritual activities.⁸ Thanks to his efforts, the number of Czech priests in Texas grew. In 1890, there were five of them. By 1920, the quantity rose to 24 (Machann and Mendl 2001: 111).

The Leopoldine Society supported the Czech Texans until its dissolution in 1914, caused by the outbreak of the First World War, as well as Pope Pius X’s 1908 exclusion of the United States from their missionary areas. This decision significantly limited the support and the number of European priests in America. Nevertheless, other Catholic organizations aided the Czechs in Texas. In 1857, the American College of the Immaculate Conception in Louvain was founded by the American bishops to facilitate the training of the priests from Belgium and neighboring states (including Bohemia and Moravia) who were willing to come to the United States. Similarly, in 1871, in the German port of Bremen, the St. Raphael Society was founded. In 1889, it opened its branch in Austria with the same mission to provide material and spiritual assistance to the migrants heading to America (Kummer 1966: 174–175).

Some of these societies were genuinely Bohemian or Moravian. In 1891 the archbishop of Olomouc Cyril Stojan established

8. Diözesanarchiv der Erzdiözese Wien, collection Leopoldinen-Stiftung Zentraldirektion, box 14, Korrespondenz mit den nordamerikanischen Diözesen, Chromčik to Leopoldinen-Stiftung, June 30, 1885.

Apoštolát sv. Cyrila a Metoděje (Apostolate of St. Cyril and Method). Its principal goal was to unite the different currents of Christianity (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox). However, after the First World War, Stojan received a petition from Czech Americans to help them maintain their language and identity by sending priests who could hold sermons in Czech. The archbishop agreed and dispatched catechist Lev Pospíšil and chaplain František Jemelka to Texas in 1922.⁹ Their mission was so successful that both repeated it in 1926. On both occasions, they visited Texas and were surprised by the attitude of the Czechs there. Jemelka held a sermon in Hostyn, in April 1923, and was astonished by how many people appeared. He called the gathering a pilgrimage of Wallachian¹⁰ Americans (Jemelka 1923: 1).

The Czech Protestants in Texas did not have the religious institutional support as the Catholics. Their pastors came with them and were assisted by their parishioners. The first one was Josef Arnošt Bergmann who came to Texas from Stroužné in Kladsko, today a region in Poland, in 1850. Some authors called him the “father”¹¹ of Czech immigration to Texas (Habenicht 1910: 78; Polišenský 1996: 20; Čapek 1920: 49). However, recent studies contest this title because Bergmann left for economic and not religious reasons (Klump and Blaha 1981: 14). Also, he never preached in Czech and associated himself with the Germans. Even the skeptics acknowledge, however, that his letters home, published in *Moravské noviny* influenced immigration from Protestant regions in Bohemia and Moravia (Chroust 2006: 48–64). Inspired by his writings and following his footsteps came other pastors like Jan Zvolánek, Josef Opočenský, and Jindřich Juren. Zvolánek held the first Czech language protestant services and Opočenský organized a Protestant community in Wesley. Juren was invited by the faithful from Wesley and Fayetteville who paid for his

9. Zemský archiv v Opavě, pobočka Olomouc, Apoštolát Cyrila a Metoděje v Olomouci (1876) 1885–1954, NAD 1522, box 4, inventory number 68, Duchovní péče Ústředního Apoštolátu sv. Cyrila a Metoděje v Olomouci o zahraniční krajany, no date or number, p. 2.

10. Jemelka refers to the region of Moravian Wallachia, today the eastern Czech Republic. He claims most visitors to his sermon were from this area.

11. The title should be interpreted in two ways. First, as originator of the migration. Second, the priests are commonly addressed with the title “father”.

ship ticket (Habenicht 1910: 78, 106, 109). The Protestants lacked the macro-organization of the Catholics, and were fragmented at first,¹² but they were able to rely more on the dominant American Protestant education system that prepared the pastors for Czech communities. The author Richard Machalek concluded that the Moravian Brethren in Texas should be called an ethnoreligious group, principally because ethnicity was an essential part of the life of their congregations and their efforts to teach Czech (Machalek 1979: 104). However, the Czech Protestants shared much of their religious beliefs with the Anglo-Americans, which led to quicker assimilation than the Catholics, especially after 1945 (Hannan 1996: 17; Hannan 2004: 242).

SACRED PLACES

In the previous section, we described the support that the Czech Texans, especially the Catholics, received from Europe. In many ways they were assisted in America more than back home. However, this was a two-way process, as Czech Texans supported the church as well by building churches, schools, and rectories, donating lots and equipment, financing their priests, and aiding religious endeavors and clubs (Hoskin 1995: 71).

The establishment of sacred places by Czech Texans presents an interesting problem. The literature offers two general examples. First, these could be sites constructed by humans for their religious purposes like temples or churches. Second, they might spring from the natural world such as rivers, mountains, and rocks, and are therefore religiously interpreted by humans. In the case of Czech Texans, we can observe both approaches and even the combination thereof. At first glance, this process would confirm the claim that a holy or sacred place could be situated anywhere and could be sanctified through association with God

12. Clinton Machann and James Mendl offer an interesting statistic of the number of Czech Protestant congregations in Texas in 1900. They mention one Presbyterian, one Congregationalist, one Methodist, and twelve nonaligned (Moravian Brethren). In 1903, thanks to the effort of Rev. Adolf Chlumský, the Moravian Brethren congregations created a United organization, the Evangelical Union of Bohemian and Moravian Brethren (Machann and Mendl 2001: 121–123).

or with religious values (Ben-Israel 1998: 285). However, we can observe a more careful attitude among the Czechs and Moravians that is best explained by a certain hierarchy that is both temporal and spatial. Hostyn in Texas was one of their first communities and was established on a bluff overlooking the flat countryside that must have resembled a “holy mountain.” Yet, it did not remain deserted: the locals built a church on the top of the bluff that soon became the place of pilgrimages of all the Czech Texans. Therefore, the example of Hostyn also fits the definition offered by Calian: “Buildings concentrate different values, expectations, and social projections of a religious community, and most times the physical place itself where the building is consecrated bears importance of its own” (2021: 139–140). Sometimes the sacred place remained uninhabited, such as the aforementioned mountain cross near Fredericksburg but a quick look at the map of Texas or a drive through the countryside, proves that the majority of the Czech sacred places appeared near their settlements. We can observe similar toponyms as in today Czech Republic. In Texas, we can find Frenstat, Moravia, Frydek, or even fictional names like Novohrad (there has not been such place in the Czech Republic) that are based in the Czech language. Some had churches that served as sacred sites, but others were “sacred” as places of cultural remembrance for the immigrants. Jan Metoděj Halamíček came to Texas as a small child, was married and, in 1885, moved with his family to an arid location between Warrenton and Fayetteville. He rented a store there and thanks to his entrepreneurial spirit he built there a small community around it which he named Roznov after Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, where he was born. The place thrived, and, in 1900, it had around one hundred inhabitants, including the members of his big family. Predominantly Czech, Halamíček organized them in several clubs to preserve their Czech heritage (Fayette County I 1996: 80; Fayette County II 1996: 160–161).

Some of these toponyms, however, have more religious context than others. Vsetin is a small community in Lavaca County and its name refers to the Protestant nature of its inhabitants, who came from Vsetín in Moravia, and whose population had already embraced the Moravian Brethren tradition since the Middle Ages. Veselí could be another example of a Protestant community

in Texas, at least until the locals started to use the anglicized version, Wesley. Similarly, the aforementioned place of pilgrimage at the bluff in Fayette County, which was later renamed Hostyn by the Catholics to commemorate St. Hostýn in Moravia. For more than one hundred years, it was considered the cradle of all Czech Catholic life in Texas. The first wooden church was built here by Czechs in 1856. The new church, Queen of the Holy Rosary, was then built in 1888 and soon became a place of great pilgrimages attended by Catholic Czechs from all over Texas. It was highlighted by many sources as an important sacred place of pilgrimage comparable to Velehrad or Radhošť in Moravia. One of the memorable celebrations (of both American Independence and of Cyril and Methodius) took place on 4 and 5 July 1925. Hostyn was visited by Karel Kašpar, bishop of Hradec Králové, who was later named Archbishop and Cardinal of Prague (*Naše Dějiny* 1939: 239–248).

The church itself was not as illustrious as were the grounds on the hillock overlooking central Texas. The locals built several chapels there which were attributed to Czech and Moravian sacred places or patrons: to the Virgin Mary of St. Hostýn, to St. Wenceslaus, and the wooden replica of the first Hostyn church from 1856 that served as a chapel of the Infant Jesus of Prague. The archbishop and cardinal of Prague Dr. Karel Kašpar himself consecrated a copy of the small statue of Jesus that touched the original in Little Side, Prague (*Naše Dějiny* 1939: 245–256).

Other Czech sacred places in Texas served for remembrance too. The twenty famous “painted churches,” a modern tourist attraction, continue to play an important role for the community today because they were designed to imitate the wooden churches in Moravia. One of the most important is the St. Mary’s Catholic Church, constructed in 1895 in Praha, Texas. Its architecture was inspired by the Gothic style, its plank upper walls and ceiling are painted, and over the altar, we can find the image of the St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague (Machann and Mendl 2001: 137). The local community participated in the construction, Father Louis P. Netardus decorated some walls, and stained-glass windows were donated by local Czechs and even Germans: Michal and Vincenc Okruhlik, Anton Gottschalk, and Anton Schumann,

or Vincenc Novák and Vincenc Doubrava. This suggests that local Germans were acculturated by the Czechs (*Naše Dějiny* 1939: 357). Other parishioners furnished the interior; the altar was brimming with decorations of seeds and bulbs from their homeland. Others donated bells, altars (e.g., the left Pieta altar was gifted by Martin and Rozina Okruhlik), the confessional, vestment case in the sacristy, stations of the cross, or communion rail (Frank Migl) (*History of Assumption* 1995: 19–20).

The sacred places, chapels, or churches were not only used as memorials, but also to participate in important activities that developed the cultural and spiritual heritage the immigrants brought with them from their homeland. We can see how important in this endeavor were the sermons from this recollection of the first preaching of Father Chromčík in Fayetteville:

[...] nevertheless, the people rushed to the poor church of Fayetteville for many miles, because at least there they received compensation for all that they lacked painfully in this foreign country of America, where they knew neither the customs nor the language of the natives,—yes, here in the church they learned about this and that and heard the word of God in their mother tongue and could sing from their throats our great church songs, here they forgot as if they were abroad, here they strengthened mentally, here again, their spirit cheered up and flew into the past—yes, many of our cheerful compatriots confessed with a trembling voice how glad they were that they could go to church here, especially their children! (Houšť, 1890: 420)

Apart from religious activities, the churches served an important community role. The parishioners organized themselves into various associations or clubs for various purposes. We can identify several types of these organizations. First, the religious clubs like St. Joseph in Fayetteville or Cyril and Methodius in Hostyn. They offered their members to study and discuss their faith. Second, the cultural organizations that helped the Czech to preserve their heritage. They could take theatrical (Tyl in Praha)¹³ or literary form. Third, sports clubs (not that popular in Texas), such as Katolický Sokol¹⁴ sv. Václav (Catholic Falcon St. Wenceslaus) in Hostyn. Fourth,

13. It was named after Josef Kajetán Tyl (1808–1856), a famous Czech playwright and nationalist. He is also the co-author of Czech national anthem.

14. Sokol (Falcon) was a Czech gymnastics organization founded by Miroslav Tyrš in 1862. The American Czechs had already organized Sokol clubs

the most important so-called “fraternal” organizations offered mutual aid to their members in case of health issues, death, bad harvest, or natural disaster. At first, the Czech Texans joined the network of nationwide organizations like Česko-slovanský podporující spolek (Czech-Slavic Benevolent Association), founded in St. Louis in 1854. Later, the distance from the center in the Midwest became an issue and when the administration was unwilling to reform the association, Czech Texans decided to start their separate organizations such as Slovanská podporující jednota státu Texas (SPJST, Slavonic Benevolent Order of State Texas) in 1897, or Katolická jednota texaská (Czech Catholic Union of Texas) (Machan and Mendl 2001: 95–97). The latter was founded in Hostyn under the influence of Father Josef Cromčík who went even to St. Louis to explain the decision. The first president was Josef Pšenčík (Czech Catholic Union 1989). The Moravian Brethren in Texas also had their benevolent organization since 1905, Podporující spolek Evangelické jednoty česko-moravských bratří (Benevolent Society of the Evangelical Unity of Czech-Moravian Brethren). Under its platform, they started to publish a Czech language newspaper *Bratské listy* (Stasney 1938: 97). These organizations, however, did not serve just one sole purpose. The associations were multifaceted, which means they served other purposes than their primary ones. Furthermore, we know that the Czechs could join two or more organizations depending on their interests.

Finally, the Czech sacred places were used abundantly during the religious festivities like open-air sermons at Hostyn or other festivals reflecting the Christian calendar (Hoskin 1995: 67). During the holy days, the Czechs practiced their customs and thus kept the tradition alive. Specifically, during Easter the boys prepared willow whips decorated with ribbons, they whipped girls’ legs and received decorated eggs (*kraslice*) or—this was more common in Texas—they washed the girls’ faces with a bucket of water to make them prettier. The next day, however, on Easter Monday, the girls could return the favor. During Christmas, other

in 1865. In the following years, these were growingly becoming Freethinkers’ domain and Catholics were banned from participation. This was the principal reason why they were not that popular in Texas and were founded usually with the distinguishing title: Katolický (Catholic) Sokol.

traditions took place. There existed a superstition that those fasting on Christmas Eve could see a golden pig (*zlaté prasátko*), and money was put under the plate during Christmas dinner, so the next year would be affluent. The families baked the famous cookies (resembling gingerbread) in shapes such as trees, animals, and Christmas trees. Together in households or churches, the Czechs sang the gift songs (*koledy*). Parts of everyday life like funerals or weddings also took place in the churches. The latter took three weeks to prepare because they were intended for the whole Czech local community. The weddings themselves served as a religious festivity (Pazdral 1942: 171-175; Czech Catholic Union 1989).

Culture, traditions, and even cuisine had a deep “spiritual” significance for the Czechs in Texas because they created a bond with their old country. They put together folk bands, one of the most famous was Bača’s, but there were many others. Together with them, the Czech Texans sang their old home folk songs and danced the polka. First at homes, but as the building of log halls, usually near the Catholic and Protestant churches, they relocated themselves there, and Saturdays and Sundays thus became a time for bonding of the communities (Machann and Mendl 2001: 159-161; Dybala and Macik 1980: 239-244). The events were also an opportunity to feast and exchange traditional food like potato pancakes with kraut, kolaches, or smoked sausages (Perutka 2019: 170-173). A relatively new invention, but one that demonstrates the bond between culture and religion, is the Polka Mass, a popular event in Texas held on Saturday or Sunday afternoons (Hannan 2005: 51). They started to appear in the US in the 1970s among ethnic polka cultures, Czechs, Poles, or Germans. Polka Mass has all the elements of a regular Mass, but it is accompanied by a live polka band. There exist two variants. Alteration of the secular polka song’s lyrics to sacred ones; or the words of the liturgy and hymns could be sung to familiar polka tunes (Walser 1992: 183).

RELIGION AND CZECH IDENTITY

Already in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the contemporary authors assessing the Czech American communities noticed two interesting aspects of their identity and cultural heritage. The criterion for them was principally the use of the Czech

language. First, the Czechs in Texas resisted the Americanization more than other communities because of their isolation, self-sufficiency, preservation of the ancestral language—both spoken and written—and the influence of ancestral religion (Hannan 2004: 235–236). Czech Texan journalist Ludvík W. Dongres noted in 1923:

After some years, when they teach children in Bohemia the ethnographic division of the Czechoslovak nation, they will say: 'Bohemians live in the Bohemia, Moravians in Moravia, Slovaks in Slovakia. Once upon a time, American Czechs lived in North America, followed by Czech Americans, and in Texas, Texas Moravians, who disappeared last.' (Dongres 1923: 276)

In some ways, this claim was prophetic because, eventually, even the Czech Texans became Americanized. Today, only a few of them speak the Czech language. On the other hand, many of them still maintain some cultural practices, such as music and cooking. Also, the highest number of Czech compatriots in the world that identify with the old country live in Texas.

Second, the contemporary authors noticed that the Catholics and Protestants were more resistant to the process of Americanization than were the Freethinkers. Famous Czech poet and writer Josef Václav Sládek visited America between 1868 and 1870. He also stayed in some Czech communities in the Northwest and was deeply concerned by their state of assimilation. In one of his feuilletons, accurately called *Ztracené duše* ("Lost Souls"), he even called them the dead branch of the Czech nation (Sládek 1871a: 1). When he visited a Czech religious colony, however, he revised his opinion:

Just as in Bohemia where the warmest Czech consciousness has been preserved in the Protestant regions, so it is in America. Bohemian, Moravian, a Protestant who clings to his tongue with all his heart and soul, tries to keep that language also in the mouths of his children. (Sládek 1871b: 1)

Similarly, in one of his articles, a catechist, Lev Pospíšil, described the differences between Catholic and Freethinkers' quarters in Chicago. He praised the former for preserving Czech identity to at least some extent, even though he was aware that they would also disappear in the American melting pot:

On the streets, older people over the age of 17 speak almost exclusively Czech. The younger ones will greet: ‚Pochválen buď J. K. [Ježíš Kristus],¹⁵ but they continue to chatter in English. They are used to talking in the church and about the religion with the priest in Czech, but elsewhere in English. Thus, Czech remains a kind of ecclesiastical language, and will also remain in churches for a long time and on cemeteries for the longest. Stop it? Barely [...] (Pospíšil 1922: 3)

The observations of the contemporary authors were later confirmed by scholars. Clinton Machann and James W. Mendl recognized the importance of the Catholics and Protestants in preserving the Czech heritage in Texas (2001: 115). The Texan ethnographer and agricultural sociologist of Czech origin Robert L. Skrabanek observed the same pattern in his autobiographical account of growing up in the Czech community of Snook, *We're Czechs*. In the last section, where he reviewed how the town changed fifty years after his Interwar youth, he associated the decline of the Czech language with the changes in the church. Despite the fierce resistance of his father and others from his generation, English became the language of the church services. Hymns, Bible, and catechisms were in English as well. Furthermore, socialization also declined. The service took one hour, and the parishioners left immediately after it. Traditional events like Sunday dinners were abandoned and with them the regular practice of speaking the Czech language (Skrabanek 2005: 228). The scholars, however, omitted the proper explanation of why religion played such an important role in preserving Czech identity, language, and cultural heritage in Texas.¹⁶ Apart from the complex network we have described in two previous sections, we can find three additional reasons.

First, it is the composition of believers and atheists among Czech Texans. Some scholars estimated that when the Czechs left

15. Praise our lord J. C. [Jesus Christ].

16. Surprisingly, the connection between religion and preserving the identity of the Czech Texans has not received proper attention from scholars. Lida Cope ignores the topic completely (Cope 2003). Eva Eckertová mentions it only briefly (Eckertová 2001: 247-248) or uses the subchapter dedicated to religion as a space for a biography of Josef Chromčík (Eckertová 2003: 105-118). Kevin Hannan was the only author that recognized the connection between religion and identity. However, even he does not analyze the subject in depth (Hannan 1996; Hannan 2004).

Austria, 90 percent claimed to be of the Catholic faith. However, many of them were Protestants already but did not want to be harassed by the Austrian officials.¹⁷ The estimate of the Catholics can be as high as 75 percent (Machann and Mendl 2001: 105, 110). Henry R. Maresh claimed in 1946 that Czech Texans were 70 percent Catholics, 25 percent Protestants, and the remainder liberals or Freethinkers (Maresh 1946: 240). The exact numbers are not as important as is the fact that the Freethought Movement did not have much support in Texas. Its members did not resist Americanization that well because their national organizations, like Sokol, which originated in the 1860s, were not that appealing to the younger generations born in America. However, it had not much of an impact in Texas, given their low numbers. Furthermore, even those who participated in the secular fraternal movement, which had its origins among Freethinkers, were not radicals and cooperated with the other groups instead of fighting them (Machann 1997: 169).

The situation in Texas differed dramatically from the cities like Chicago, St. Louis, or Cleveland. There the number of Freethinkers was much higher, and they started a bitter cultural war with the Catholics. It encompassed heated public debates, invectives in their respective newspapers, and even lawsuits. The scholar Karel D. Bicha points out that Czech anticlericalism was unique compared to other European immigrants in America. The principal reason was the association of the Catholics with the Habsburg monarchy in Austria. The Freethinkers believed (wrongly) that the Catholics were not nationalist enough. Even the big unifying moment between the laic part of the compatriots (Bohemian National Alliance) and the Catholics (Union of Czech Catholics) during the First World War happened at the end of the conflict, in 1918 when their representatives co-signed the Pittsburg Agreement with the future president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. The alliance, however, did not last after the war (Bicha 1980: 96–97).

Second, the Czechs in Texas formed isolated communities or rather families. Melinda Hoskin explains in her master's thesis:

17. Since 1781 Protestantism was tolerated in Austria but only after 1867 was there any genuine freedom of religion. Still, many of the immigrants changed their religion only in the United States.

They were isolated by miles and insulated by a desire to practice their culture, free from the oppression of their homeland. The family unit dominated Czech society, the community enhanced and supported Czech ethnicity, and the Czechs developed unique organizations to maintain a high degree of Czech ethnicity (Hoskin 1995: 78–79).

However, the Czech Texans' isolationism manifested itself also in other areas. One of them was the family marriage policy, especially among Catholics. Young people were encouraged to marry someone within the community. The parents preferred someone of the same faith or at least the same ethnicity. Mixed marriages, even between Czechs and Moravians, were sometimes discouraged.

Another isolationist instrument was the system of national parishes of the Catholic church. The Papacy and church authorities acknowledged that different European ethnic groups have their distinguished versions of Catholicism. In the second half of the nineteenth century, national parishes were established in the United States. Thanks to this policy, the Czechs in Texas could celebrate the liturgy in their native tongue which explains the growing number of Czech priests. In 1918, the Papacy decided not to create new national parishes, but this did not affect the already existing ones. It is noteworthy that adjacent to the parishes were the schools (discussed below), where children also learned in Czech. The statistics confirm their popularity. Czech Catholic school enrollment never declined between 1895 and 1945 (Walch 1994: 142, 148).

The isolationism of the Czech Texans encompassed various areas. In part, it was a product of the abundance of lands in Texas. Unlike the village system of small lots back home that was shaped by centuries, in Texas the farms were far away from each other, separated by vast cotton plantations. It principally affected those who came to Texas as adults. They suffered from loneliness and a lack of social life which led in many cases to negative social pathological phenomena like alcoholism. But, on the other hand, the Czechs in Texas sought a social structure similar to that of their village communities back home, and they discovered it in the church (Hoskin 1995: 71).

Third, the American school system allowed teaching in various languages in the nineteenth century. At least the praxis was predominantly tolerated by local authorities. Only after the First

World War, the states with a strong presence of immigrants started to introduce obligatory teaching in English as part of their assimilation and nation-building agendas (Beykont 2005: 110–111). Thanks to this relaxed system, the Czechs in Texas invited teachers like Josef Mašík who taught the children in Czech, helping to preserve their cultural identity.¹⁸

However, the situation in Texas, or at least in Fayette County, turned worse in the 1880s. Paradoxically, it was because of the activity of a Czech Catholic, Augustin Haidušek. At first sight, his résumé resembles the ideal American Dream. He came to Texas with his father at a young age, attended English school, joined the Confederate army, studied law, and in 1875 became (probably) the first Czech mayor in the United States in La Grange. Later he was a member of the Texas Congress and county judge of Fayette County. He assumed that his impeccable career was possible only thanks to his English education and acculturation (Johnson 1914: 1838–1840).

When he became the county judge in 1884, he tried to persuade his Czech compatriots to follow in his footsteps. He decided all the schools in Fayette must teach in English and not hire teachers unfit for the task. Haidušek followed the logic that learning English was essential for the Czechs to develop themselves in their new home. He did not want them to abandon completely their cultural heritage, but he wanted them to recognize their civic obligations to the United States. Some Czechs were furious. For example, Josef S. Čada the editor of the newspaper *Slovan* in La Grange started a campaign against him. Another journalist, František Boleslav Zdrůbek, labeled him as a “Czech criminal renegade of Texas” (Jochech 1940: 41–47).

Yet, Haidušek was supported by many Czechs and Moravians in Texas, who considered his policy adequate. After all, they twice re-elected him as judge. To defend his stance, he started to publish his own Czech language newspaper *Svoboda*, where he explained the necessity of English as a school language:

18. The authors Maresh and Hudson claim that: “It has been authoritatively established that Josef Mašík was the first Czech teacher in the United States” (1934: 172).

We left our homeland with the intention of settling in America forever. We did so of our own free will, no one forced us to do so. [...] it is our sacred duty to become American citizens not only by law but also from the ground up. [...] American citizens must also be useful; but to become such, they need some knowledge—and we do not get that. Every reasonable person will learn that the main condition of the people's government is the education of its citizens. [...] The idea that a person who does not know English can also be a useful American citizen like one who knows English is really ridiculous. (Haidušek 1889: 4)

Haidušek's actions only strengthened the role of the church in education. Both Catholics and Protestants used Czech not only in their services but also in the adjacent schools. These could take form of weekend schools where the Czech language and history were taught (Hoskin 1995: 71), or, as Robert L. Skrabanek describes, they could take the form of a summer camp:

The Czech-Moravian Brethren church organized and maintained a Czech school for over six decades that convened every summer for a period of one month. Although the school was sponsored by this religious group, its teachings were non-denominational and some Catholic children were always in attendance, for the central aim of this school was to perpetuate the Czech language. (Skrabanek 1950: 185)

Skrabanek refers to the famous Hus Memorial School or Husova škola in Czech. According to the sources it was Rev. Adolph Chlumský, who invited a group of talented girls from various congregations to give them Sunday school management. In 1909, the first meeting of the Sunday School Union was held. Five years later, Rev. Hegar and Rev. Barton invited eighteen students and organized an eight-week teachers' training school. This event started a yearly tradition of the Hus Scholl (or Hus Encampment), where the classes were in the Czech language. Even though the location changed over time, it could be labeled as a sacred place of the Czech Texans (Machan and Mendl 2001: 125; Stasney 1938: 90).

The uniqueness of Czech Texas is staggering especially when we compare it to similar Czech communities in the United States. The Czechs in Iowa, for instance, were also a predominantly rural society, and their share of the total population of the state was similar to Texas, but they Americanized more quickly. We can observe this process already in the interwar period. The leading Catholics in Texas wrote in 1939 an astonishing and monumental

(slightly over seven hundred pages) book *Naše Dějiny* in Czech, documenting their principal actors (both personalities and organizations) and their sacred places. By contrast, the Czechs in Iowa did not try to write their history. Surprisingly, even some shorter texts related to anniversaries of their churches appeared in a bilingual form, with English being even dominant (*Památka svěcení* 1926). This occurred not just in the urban areas. The Czech nucleus in rural Iowa and once-proud host to the famous composer, Antonín Dvořák, Spillville, published its 70-year jubilee booklet of their St. Wenceslaus church only in English (*Diamond Jubilee* 1935). Even more surprising is the comparison of Catholic schools. In Texas, they were a platform to preserve the Czech cultural heritage and identity. In Iowa, the largest Czech church community of St. Wenceslaus in Cedar Rapids printed invitations, programs, and other material in English already in 1907 (*Commencement exercises* 1907). The reason behind the Americanization of the Czechs in Iowa is simple. The Catholics there were not an isolated community, they were in contact with Freethinkers and their organizations like Sokol, with their newspapers and this led them to abandon faster their identity and heritage. Also, the community's support for organized religion was more powerful in Texas than in Iowa. Author Kevin Hannan mentions it as one of the most distinguishable traits (2004: 242).

CONCLUSIONS

The Czech Texans are a unique ethnic group in the United States of America. Over time they distinguished themselves from other Czech Americans but also from the Bohemians and Moravians that stayed at home. Breton (1964) called this process the creation of a unique identity rather than the preservation of one from their homeland. However, we have to acknowledge that the hypothesis we have established is correct, and the Czech Texans preserved most of their identity and longer than other ethnicities or other Czech Americans. This article has demonstrated that religion played a crucial role in this process through the establishment of sacred places.

The reason is fourfold. First, the universalistic role of the church created a bond between the migrants and its own European/Aus-

trian/Czech institutions. Their organizations were also the only ones that supported the migrants either by direct subsidies or by sending priests to Texas. Second, the established sacred places served indeed a multifaceted role. They were not just religious spaces but also sites of remembrance of their homeland, fundamental for the preservation of their cultural heritage and ethnic identity. The churches and chapels also served as an important amalgam of Czech Texan society supplementing a role of their old village structure that was not otherwise present in the Texas landscape. Third, Czech Texans were numerically the most religious Czech community in the United States, which meant they were not losing their identity because the Freethinkers, who lost the Czech identity more quickly, were almost absent. Fourth, the Czech Texans isolated themselves from other ethnicities in Texas, and religion played an important role in the process. Either as a way of isolation or as a unifying element of the Czech society. The institutionalization of the national parish was crucial because it gave them the opportunity to hold masses in the Czech tongue and establish church schools that taught the language and Czech history to preserve their identity. All these points prove that religion created an interesting network of contacts among Czech Texans, and it helped them to create a unique cultural heritage that shares traits with their homeland, much more than that of any other group of Czech expatriates.

*Sacred Spaces
In North America*

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Abstract: The process of Czech and Moravian immigration to Texas is a well-known phenomenon. Since 1848, tens of thousands decided to cross the ocean to seek a better future in the “Lone Star state.” Although their history is well documented, there are still themes to be explored. Their religious activity and the connection it has created with their metropolis is one of them. The church and its institutions sent priests to America to attend to the immigrants in their mother tongue and helped them preserve their cultural identity. Furthermore, they organized the construction of their sacred places that would remind the parishioners of their home country. One example could be the famous painted churches still present in Texas today. This topic has not received proper attention from historians because it requires studying sources on both sides of the Atlantic. The presented contribution tries to change this unflattering fact using the microhistorical approach. Its aim is threefold. First, explain the historical dimension of the religious connection between the Czech and Moravian immigrants in Texas with their metropolis. Second, describe the sacred places of the immigrants, how they were built, what role they played in their everyday life,

and how they established a bond with their country of origin. Third, what importance did the sacred places of the Czechs and Moravians have in preserving their language and cultural identity? The microhistorical approach demands the use of various and fragmented sources, and this study will be no exception. It will use archive material from Austria and the Czech Republic, principally the funds of the religious organizations that supported the immigrants in Texas, such as the Leopoldine Society. Furthermore, the article will use published contemporary personal recounts and secondary literature. The content of these sources will be critically analysed to answer the research questions and hopefully contribute to the theme of religion and its invaluable role in an immigrant society.

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