

A Svihovec Sketch

By Kevin Carvell

Just as a family's history is never completed, at least until the last member has been entombed, so too is this Svihovec history unfinished. It's the most modest of beginnings, replete with omissions and oversights. It is, in fact, only a sketch and all those who read it are encouraged to make corrections and add stories and insights to mold it into a perfect and polished product. Of course, we never want to see it finished, but desire, instead, to forever add the chapters.

Bohemian Roots

In the highlands of Bohemia, 50 miles southeast of Prague, just a mile off the railroad line which runs south from the Czech capitol, is the almost invisible hamlet of Leskovice.

It is here, in a province of the powerful Austro-Hungarian Empire of the 19th Century, to which the American family of Svihovecs traces its roots. It was this region, the south and west of Bohemia, where whole communities were depopulated as their residents left for America. At the peak of the flood, the Svihovecs joined their countrymen in the outward tide.

Ironically, it may well have been American farmers in the Middle West that forced the Svihovecs and several hundred thousand other Czechs to sell their land, travel north to the great German North Sea ports of Hamburg and Bremen and embark on the ocean voyage to the new world. Cheap American grain pouring into Europe depressed commodity prices and raised the specter of ruin for Bohemian farmers.

In addition, the first steps in agricultural modernization were starting to take hold. German squires, holders of large estates in Bohemia, expanded rapidly and began to mechanize. Land became scarce with prices driven to unprecedented levels as property was concentrated in fewer hands. At the same time, there was a population boom, with the number of Czechs rising 45% between 1845 and 1910. One result was that, when parents died, farms were subdivided among numerous children into tiny, uneconomic parcels.

The Industrial Revolution had begun and peasants and small farmers driven from the Czech countryside found factory jobs in nearby cities. But in the Svihovec homeland, "a hilly backwater,"

as one historian called it, there was no industrialization, no alternatives. And while other rural areas of the nation had land that was flat and rich, this was a relatively infertile region of long winters and a short growing season.

It was a period of stormy evolution, the future was bleak and small farmers knew it. Emigration began as a trickle in the 1840s and became a torrent by the late 1880s. For people who had never gone more than a few miles from their home villages, migration was a desperate act. But these emigrants were not destitute nor society's dregs. By and large, they were small and moderate-size farmers, highly literate -- almost 99% could read and write -- and were families that had enough foresight to sell their farms while they still had some equity. They exited while they could yet afford to, before disaster struck, while they still controlled their lives, and arrived in America with more money in their pockets than the average immigrant.

At the same time that they were being pushed out by economic forces, they were being pulled by attractive reports flowing from earlier immigrants to America and advertising propaganda from steamship firms, American railroads, and land companies. The news was so glowing from America, Czechs joked, "that kolaches must grow on trees."

Another factor driving emigration was a repressive political climate. Czech language papers had only recently been allowed to publish. Until 1886, no one could legally send a telegram in the Czech language. The Austrian imperial bureaucracy handled all affairs, national and local, and even the Catholic Church was led by a German-speaking clergy.

The Empire grew uneasy as its pool of draft age men dwindled and Czech nationalists despaired as their country emptied out. Efforts were made to discourage emigration. Newspapers warned of the hazards of going to America. The citizenry was cautioned, for example, that "No matter where you go, bread will have a crust." It was only when authorities placed a tariff on grain imports and crop prices rose in response that emigration quieted, continuing at no more than a modest pace until World War I brought it to a stop.

In the midst of this great outpouring of Bohemians came a father, mother and nine sons leaving the village where they had lived for generations. These were the Svihovecs, a family whose surname is connected to an imposing 15th Century fortress 30 miles away. Known as Svihov Castle, it was built on an artificial island on the Unlava River by Puta Svihovsky and his sons with the help of the King's own architect.

The mother of our Svihovec clan was Barbora (the English spelling is Barbara) Ocenasek, the daughter of Frantisek Ocenasek and Katerina Srp. She was born Oct. 8, 1846, in the hamlet of Pacelice. Her father was what was known as a sedlak, a term that

indicated a successful peasant farmer with ownership of anywhere from 12 to 50 acres and perhaps even as much as 200 acres, one who was likely well-to-do enough to own a horse, who hired employees, and who perhaps had added income from a trade. Her mother's father, Tomas Srp, was also from Pacelice and also a sedlak. His wife was Marie Marsove from Budicovic, a village 20 miles southeast.

The father of our clan, Frantisek (Frank) Svihovec, was born April 24, 1843, at Leskovice, a tiny place six miles south of Pacelice, to Jan Svihovec and Josefa Liskovce. Jan's parents were Tomas Svihovec of Leskovice and Anna Vanous, the daughter of Matej Vanous of Chrastovice, a hamlet just a mile north of Leskovice. All these families were sedlaks. However, Josefa's parents -- Frantisek Liskovec from Chrastovice and Marie Capek (whose father was Vaclav Capek, a sedlak from Chrastovice) were themselves chalupniks, a term which meant "small holder" or "cottagers" and indicated they were smaller producers, tenant farmers of perhaps just 10-12 acres, but still fortunate enough to own a cottage and who could perhaps occasionally employ a laborer to help them.

Frank and Barbara married when they were in their early 20s on a mid-winter day -- Feb. 18, 1868 -- in the region's hub, Blatna, a town of several thousand about three miles north of Pacelice. We know little of their life in Bohemia except that they were farmers and considered progressive. At a time when hand flails were still used for threshing grain, for example, the Svihovecs and their neighbors had their own threshing machine, a mechanical device powered by two men with hand cranks.

That autumn saw the arrival of the first of nine sons born over 19 years -- Frantisek (Frank Jr.) arrived Nov. 11, 1868. He was followed by Karel (Charles), Jan 25, 1870; Eduard (Edward), Dec. 4, 1871; Cenek (Vincent), Jan. 14, 1874; Josef (Joseph), Feb. 7, 1876; Emanuel (Emil), Jan 13, 1877; Rudolph William, April 1880; James T., September 1882; and Alois Matej (Louis Mathew) Feb. 6, 1887. Czech archival records show that all, except Rudolph and James, were born at Leskovice. The birthplace of those two sons is unclear, but it seems likely it was also at Leskovice.

Coming to America

It was 1886 when the Svihovec emigration began. Although the great impetus to Czech emigration was economic, military conscription played at least a modest role and the family's oral tradition indicates that after Frank Jr. ended up in the army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the threat that additional sons would be drafted encouraged the family to leave. Although young males weren't suppose to emigrate until they served in the military, that requirement was not rigorously enforced by the authorities.

The Svihovec's second eldest son, Charles, was 16 and the family's next candidate for the draft when, in the company of friends, he was sent to New York. Although he had worked in Bohemia as a cabinet maker, his first American job was at a funeral home. Disliking the work, the teenager found employment at the summer home on Long Island of millionaire W.B. Cutting and, later, for the famed Vanderbilt family. On those large estates, he served as a farm hand and lawn mower for \$1.25 a day.

Edward immigrated in March 1891, Vincent (who had training as an accountant) in June, and the rest of the family (except Rudolph) arrived in November 1893 aboard the 1,200-passenger German steamer "Trave." The youngest son, Louis, was six. Rudolph arrived a month later. Also on board, sailing with Frank and Barbara's family, was another group of Svihovecs, a widow named Anna and what seemed to be her children: Ruzena, 20; Maria, 10; Vaclav, 9; and Filomena, 3. All trace of them was lost long ago.

During this period of emigration, some family members found employment as servants and others in constructing the New York subway system, but the parents and likely most of the rest of the family did not stay in New York. In fact, in the same month Frank Sr. and Barbara arrived in America, they had already gotten halfway across the continent to Renville County, MN, and were buying 170 acres of farmland in Sacred Heart Township. They were joining Edward and Charles, who had moved with their families to rented farms in Renville County in the spring of 1892.

A Life in Minnesota

Located in south central Minnesota, Renville County had been settled since the 1850s and it's not clear why the Svihovecs chose it instead of continuing on to the free homesteads further west in the Dakotas. This part of Minnesota does, however, have a substantial Bohemian population. The town of New Prague is not far away and the crossroads of Bechyn, a few miles from Renville, still sponsors an annual Czech celebration.

The Svihovec farm land was in two parcels, on opposite sides of a road, two miles southwest of the small town of Renville. Today, the farm sits just a mile off U.S. 212, the highway which runs from the Twin Cities west to the Black Hills. The Renville area is fertile, rich farm country, home now to a successful sugarbeet industry. The Svihovec land was handicapped, however, by the presence of Sacred Heart Creek which winds lazily through the property and meant the adjacent land might often be too wet to farm. In addition, the creek's bottom land was strewn with glacial rocks.

Protected by an old tree grove, a two-story farm house, which

Renville old-timers say dates back to the Svihovecs, still stands just off a gravel road. This modest Svihovec home, in a farmyard overgrown with brush, has been abandoned for years and begun to collapse. Visitors hear wild animals scuttling about in the second story. Its main floor has three rooms, one of which may have been added later. A handsome barn is on the property, but its construction almost certainly occurred after the Svihovecs left. A second farmstead, also with a dilapidated, long-abandoned, two-story home, stands on the other Svihovec land a half mile west. That structure is a log cabin which was sided over at some point in its history.

Frank and Barbara, who arrived in the U.S. with a reasonable nest egg of \$4,000 (equivalent to perhaps \$120,000 today), bought the land from Lars and Maria Lien for \$2,300, apparently paying almost \$1,000 cash and taking out a six year mortgage for \$1,370. A week later, they took out another mortgage from the Liens for \$209. The Liens were wealthy farmers in the money lending business. One Renville citizen remembers their reputation: "Well, I don't know how to put this, but I guess you'd say they were sort of loan sharks."

It's noteworthy that the Lien family, more than 100 years later, still owned much of this same land, including half the Svihovec acreage.

The purchase was an interesting one because it included not just the land and buildings, but everything else the family needed -- livestock, machinery, and even a complete set of household goods. About the only items missing were bedding and pictures for the walls.

Only one person could be found in 1996 with roots in the Renville community who remembered the Svihovecs. He was William Nelson, then 93 and a Wisconsin resident. Nelson himself left Renville a few years after the Svihovecs, departing in 1914 at the age of 10. Understandably, his memories of the Svihovecs are dim. Although they were his family's closest neighbors, all he can call up from his childhood and his parents' recollections is that the Svihovecs were considered "good neighbors, but then everybody was a good neighbor in those days." Nelson accurately recalls that the family name was then pronounced "Svee-ho-vec," a pronunciation still favored today by native Czech speakers.

By 1895, the family of Frank Jr. was residing on a farm in Emmett Township just to the east while Charles' and Edwards' families were on separate farms a few miles northeast in Crooks Township. Frank and Barbara and the other seven sons were on the two home farms. All were farmers.

Five years later, in 1900, Joseph, James and Lewis were still living with their parents. Vincent and his family were now on the adjacent farm while Frank Jr. had moved to Crooks Township and Emil

had moved in with him. Charles and his family were living some miles east in Bird Island Township and Rudolph lived with them.

In 1905, Louis was living by himself in the town of Renville, the family of Frank Jr. remained in Crook Township, Charles' family was now a few miles east in Troy Township, the newly married Emil was a few miles north in Ericson Township, and Joseph's new family was on one of the family's two farms in Sacred Heart Township. On the other farm, Vincent was now listed as head of the household and his parents and younger brother James lived with him and his family.

There had been a flurry of marriages and births as the Svihovecs started families.

The first-born, Frank Jr., had married Rose (or Rosa) Holmn (or Hallman) in Bohemia in 1893. Several children were born on their rented farms in Minnesota: a firstborn who died at birth April 13, 1894; Helen, born May 1895; George, January 1897; Emil, February 1899; Robert Leo, May 4, 1900; Hattie, May 16, 1903; and Louis, May 2, 1906. The other children, born in North Dakota, were Sybil, born about 1908; Rufus, May 17, 1910; and Iola Rose, Jan. 14, 1913.

Charles married Anna Trestik on August or Sept. 15, 1891, likely in the New York City area, and their first child, Anna, was born at East Islip, NY, Dec. 21 or 22, 1891. When they came to Minnesota, they rented a farm near the county seat of Olivia, just a few miles east of Renville. For 13 years, they leased various farms as sharecroppers. In a photo taken just before they left for North Dakota, the family lined up in a plowed field in their Sunday best. Behind them are several small barns and a pleasant, two-story home. Seven children were born in Renville County: James Frank, Sept. 26, 1893; Anastacia (Stella), July 23, 1895; Procopius (Prokop), July 4, 1897; Elizabeth May, April 3, 1899; Mary Magdalene (Margaret), Dec. 2, 1900; Emma (Ema), April 9, 1904; and Albertus Carolus (Albert), Oct. 25, 1905. A ninth child, Clara, was the first of all of the Svihovecs to be born in North Dakota, arriving Nov. 15, 1907.

Edward married Terezie (whose first name is listed in the 1895 Census as Rose) Krivanec, apparently in New York, and two children were born in Minnesota -- Frank on Nov. 21, 1894; and William at Olivia Feb. 3, 1896. Two other children died at birth or early infancy and are believed buried at Olivia. Those deaths may have contributed to Terezie's reputed dissatisfaction with rural life. In any case, the couple moved back to New York, to a Manhattan neighborhood called Yorkville, about 1900. Known as Little Czechoslovakia, it was full of four and five story apartment houses considered tenements. Because he had training in Bohemia in stone cutting, Edward went into the marble business and prospered, doing well enough to eventually buy homes for his sons. In addition to Frank and William, two other children survived: Edward, born June

7, 1898, and Helen, Dec. 3, 1903.

Vincent was married in Olivia Nov. 23, 1897, to a woman whose first name is Anna and whose last name, apparently because of the difficulty in pronouncing it, is wonderfully misspelled in various documents as Hanna, Hana, Hine, Hanni, Henna, Hannl and Hejni. Both listed their homes as Bechyln, the nearby rural community dominated by Czechs. Four or five children were born in Renville County and two more in North Dakota: Wencil/Wenzel (James), Sept. 20, 1898; Bertha, July 9, 1900; Agnes, Oct. 28, 1902; Henry, March 2, 1905; Alvina, May 20, 1906; and Julia, July 30, 1909. Church records also list an Elizabeth born at Renville Jan. 20, 1900, but surviving family members say there was no such child.

Joseph, who had training as a blacksmith, married Anna Buchal Jan. 25, 1904, and they had two children, both born in Renville County: Anthony, Oct. 20, 1904, and Alice Ann, Oct. 8, 1905.

Emil, meanwhile, fell in love. The relationship, however, didn't last and when the engagement was broken off, he left for New York City where he stayed with his brother, Edward, and worked as a painter and became a cook. For years thereafter, he was called upon to taste food and pass judgment. Mementos of those New York days, his towering, white, professional chef's hat and a long sleeved, collarless, white cook's jacket, traveled with him back to Minnesota and then to North Dakota where they were brought out of a trunk for the children to wear on Halloween.

It was New York where he met a Bohemian woman with the same first name of his mother -- Barbara, a tall, ash blonde with blue eyes and fair complexion. Born Jan. 2, 1881, back in the old country on her family farm in a solid two-story, red-tiled roofed home which still stands today, she was the youngest of seven children, the daughter of a well-to-do couple, Antonie Svehla of Mecichov and Vaclav Klecan. He was mayor of Doubrovice and director of the church choir. (The Klecan family farmed for 19 generations, but Vaclav's son saw their land appropriated by the government in the wake of the Communist takeover after World War II.) Members of the Klecan family still live in that area of Bohemia, at Lazanky.

After pleading with her parents, Barbara had been allowed to come to America to visit her married sisters, Antonie (Aunt Nettie) Hencir of Connecticut and Marie Makec of New York City. Although she fully intended to return home, she instead encountered a youth who had, coincidentally, grown up just three miles away from her home town. From that meeting at a dance at a recreation hall catering to Bohemian youths, a romance with the young chef blossomed and her plans to sail back to Bohemia abandoned. Even though her family thought she was marrying beneath herself, she accepted Emil's proposal and they were wed at the Bohemian Presbyterian Church in Manhattan Jan. 9, 1904. Shortly thereafter, they headed for Renville County.

Like Frank and Barbara, Emil and Barbara also had nine children. The first, born Jan. 5, 1905, at Renville, was a boy baptised as Otokier, but whose birth certificate listed him as Otto. A second son, born Theodore Dominic (the name Dominic was sometimes replaced in later years by the name Paul), arrived in Renville Sept. 4, 1906. The other seven were born after the family moved to the homestead in western North Dakota: Charles B., Feb. 17, 1908; Rudolph Arthur, April 2, 1910; Blanche Barbara, Dec. 28, 1911; Sylvia Agatha (or Sylvia Augusta as she preferred), Jan. 1, 1914; Milo Luke, Jan. 5, 1916; Emily Mae, July 11, 1919; and Adele (Adeline) Ethel, Sept. 28, 1921. (As a toddler, Adele started being called Adeline, the name of her brother Rud's girl friend. It was only as an adult that, much to her surprise, she learned her real name was Adele.

With the exception of Edward who returned to New York, the Svihovecs' lives for more than a decade, from 1893 to 1906, revolved around their farms in central Minnesota. Despite Emil and Barbara's marriage in a Protestant ceremony, the families retained a loyalty to the Catholic Church as evidenced by weddings and baptisms at Holy Redeemer in Renville and St. Aloysius in Olivia. However, the baptisms of several children are not recorded in church records, a fact that leads to the suspicion not all the family members were completely faithful. Czechs of this era were divided into two strong camps: Catholics and free thinkers. The latter group was composed of agnostics, or at least those opposed to organized religion, and who created a set of clubs and organizations as an alternative to the formal church. Although Bohemia was almost completely Catholic, many people, particularly from the Svihovecs' home region, were only nominally tied to the church. When they moved to America, a startling 50 to 70 percent discarded, at least initially, Catholicism. An equally plausible explanation for the lack of Svihovec baptismal documents, however, is that some records were destroyed when Holy Redeemer Church burned in the 1920s.

Of Emil and Barbara's children, the records show Otto and Ted baptized at Holy Redeemer in Renville. However, Emil and Barbara were not as conscientious about their religious obligations during homestead days. When Fr. Anthony Kopp of Mott discovered some years later, apparently at the time of Barbara's funeral, that Rud, who was already 14, Blanche, Sylvia, Milo, Emily, and Adeline were unbaptized, he was not a happy cleric. It's said he moved on to the homestead and stayed two weeks preparing the children for the sacraments. Those were finally administered at St. Vincent's Jun 16, 1924. At the same time, two of Frank and Rosa's children - Rufus, 14, and Iola, 11 - were also belatedly baptized.

The family's loyalty was switching to America. Frank Sr. and his sons Frank Jr., Joseph, and Vincent signed court documents in 1896 rejecting allegiance to the emperor of Austria and announcing their intent to become citizens. They were naturalized in 1899.

Edward, meanwhile, had begun that process in 1892. The two youngest sons, James and Louis, because they were still minors when their father was naturalized, automatically became citizens at that point. Along with the children, the wives also automatically won citizenship when the husbands were sworn in. Two more sons, Emil and Rudolph, were naturalized in 1901. Rudolph took an additional step and, in an attempt to Americanize his last name, had changed it to Svihove by the time he became a citizen. The English language was embraced although by 1900 Frank and Barbara, Frank Jr. and his wife Rose, and Vincent's wife Anna could not yet speak it.

With the mortgage to the Liens due Jan. 1, 1899, Frank and Barbara took out another mortgage right after Christmas of 1898 with a Wisconsin man for \$300. Perhaps that additional mortgage was a sign the farm had not been kind to them. And, significantly, none of the sons had purchased land, but remained tenant farmers.

Homesteading in Dakota

This was the period of a Dakota land boom and Minnesota papers and Czech language publications filled with ads from railroads and land companies promoting the glories of North Dakota. Testimonials from happy homesteaders appeared as letters to the editor. As an inducement, cut-rate rail fares were available to travel and inspect prospective farm lands.

In Renville's newspaper, the Star-Farmer, the Svihovecs probably read the report of a Mr. Hanie, fresh from visiting North Dakota, who wrote, "I saw the prettiest, richest land I ever laid my eyes on in America. Old settlers and other trustworthy persons assured me that they had always had an abundant or fair crop at least."

Hans Sundquist wrote from Bowman County in southwest North Dakota: "I have been here a little over a month and like myself fine. The only trouble so far is that there has been so much rain."

Renville was filled with news of residents leaving for North Dakota and the Svihovecs must have been reminded of the similar exodus of not so many years earlier that they had witnessed in Bohemia.

Renville real estate dealer C.F. Clay took landseekers out to southwest North Dakota every Tuesday in the summer of 1905. "This," he accurately warned, "will in all probability be the last year when you will have a chance to get a homestead of any value. They are selling at an astonishingly rapid rate."

The William Brown Company, the biggest land dealer in southwest North Dakota and the founder of Mott, distributed posters that declared, "Free Coal! Fine Climate! Productive Soil! Excellent

Water! Superior Class of People!"

Fortunes were to be made. A North Dakota promotional magazine, *The Record*, said, "Land can be broken, seeded to flax, and the land paid for in one year." Land was still cheap, but purchasers were promised values would rise sharply and continue increasing in the years ahead.

The Svihovecs bit. They traveled to southwest North Dakota in 1906, probably landing just east of Dickinson at Gladstone. Typically, entrepreneurs known as locators and based at towns along the Northern Pacific Railroad would load a wagon full of land seekers and, for \$25 a head, show them available sites. Vacant land was found along the Adams and Hettinger county line, 17 miles southwest of where the William Brown Co. was at that moment erecting the first building in the new village of Mott. The Svihovecs initially homesteaded six quarter sections (and, later, a seventh) of rolling, treeless, unbroken prairie that strategically almost encircled a section of railroad-owned land. Up to that point, the country had been home to only isolated cattle and sheep ranches with up to 20,000 head. And stone tepee rings on the Svihovec land pointed to an earlier culture.

That fall, on a Saturday morning on the home farm in Minnesota, they pulled their equipment and livestock together and held an auction. Under the title "Svihovec Brothers," they sold an array of goods: household items, 200 chickens, 14 spring pigs and a full-blood boar, three buggies and two lumber wagons, a stone dodger sulky plow, two McCormick binders, a drill, a fanning mill, three corn shellers, three drags, five hay rakes (two of them self dumpers), two riding and two walking corn cultivators, harnesses, two calves, two heifers, four fresh cows, two 11-year-old mares (one bay and one gray in color), a 13-year-old bay mare, two nine-year-old gray mares, four eight-year-old bay horses, a three-year-old bay horse and a ten-year-old horse.

The Renville paper took no notice of their departure. Indeed, the Svihovecs rarely had been mentioned. A year earlier, however, the paper had pointed out that Louis had gone to Medina, ND, to visit his brother, Rudolph.

While Emil, Frank Jr., Louis, James, Vincent, and Joseph staked their claims in 1906, Charles didn't accompany them. But a few months later, in January, he took his claim, on the south side of that same section of railroad land.

Many years later, when Emil recalled the day the brothers had selected their 160 acres, he unhappily said it had been done quickly, without much thought and, as a result, he ended up with the worst quarter.

It was the high-water mark of immigration to North Dakota. Homesteaders filed on 2.7 million acres of government land that

year. From 1900 to 1910, North Dakota's population grew 81 percent. More than a quarter million settlers moved into the state. Adams and Hettinger counties, which had only had a handful of ranchers, were settled with phenomenal speed. Adams County exploded from 300 people to 5,400. By 1908, almost every quarter section held a family. Driven by land fever, the knowledge that it was now or never, that cheap acreage or, in the case of government land, free homesteads would soon be gone forever, immigrants poured onto the prairie.

Only Edward, on his way to success in New York, and Rudolph, who had become a barber, opted not to join their brothers. Rudolph first lived in Medina, ND, where he was employed as a barber and played clarinet in the Carey Orchestra. By 1911, he had moved to Minneapolis where he first toiled as a salesman before returning to barbering, working in a shop in the grand Dyckman Hotel. He prospered. By about 1928 he was owner of a shop downtown in the lobby of the Metropolitan Life Insurance building. In 1941, he was respected in his profession, chairing the Minnesota Board of Barber Examiners. He married a woman named Nellie G. and they had two daughters, Lillian and Iola.

Joining the exodus from Renville County and settling next to the Svihovecs were Joseph Novak and his wife, Mary, the sister of Vincent's wife, Anna. They had been godparents at the baptisms of several of Vincent and Anna's children back in Renville County. With the exception of the Komendas, two Bohemian families who may have been Svihovec in-laws, most other neighbors were Norwegians, German-Russians, or Anglo-Americans. The Svihovecs were, however, among more than 7,000 Czechs in North Dakota.

After their Minnesota auction, the Svihovec men departed to set up housekeeping in North Dakota. An unpleasant surprise welcomed them. One of the largest prairie fires ever in the northwest had that autumn burned everything over a 100 mile stretch from the Rainy Buttes south of New England all the way east to the Missouri River. Scores of homesteaders had shanties and possessions destroyed while they ran for their lives. Many were left destitute. Hundreds of head of livestock were destroyed. Fearful of being lynched by angry settlers and ranchers, the homesteader whose cook fire started the blaze fled the country that night and was never seen again.

Although their late arrival meant they missed the initial horror of the fire, the Svihovecs found that the foot-high prairie grass they were depending on to feed their livestock had been burned. That meant they had to make repeated eight-mile round trips to the other side of the Cedar River, the southern boundary of the fire, to collect hay.

The homestead was a remote place. The nearest railroad stop was Gladstone, 50 miles north, a two day trip, with an overnight stop four miles north of what would later be the village of Regent

-- a hotel, store and post office known as Horswill after the J.O. Horswill family that operated it. No roads existed, only paths wandering cross country. On one trip to hook up with the Gladstone Trail, the men filled a wagon with rocks which were dropped off to mark the way. To help travelers locate the homestead in the vast, rolling prairie sea, a pole with a cloth attached was erected on the homesteads' highest spot, a site known today as Flag Hill and the location of a monument commemorating the Svihovecs.

During the first winter, food ran short and Emil and Frank were forced to set off on foot for groceries. On the long trip to Gladstone, they came across a well-stocked female homesteader and bought supplies. So famished was Frank that he ate an entire baloney at one sitting. Finishing it, he realized he'd also consumed the long string that kept the casing on. Since a small piece still dangled from his mouth, Emil managed to pull the whole length out of Frank's stomach.

The two single brothers, Louis and James, put up simple frame structures on their homesteads, probably like the typical claim shanty of that era, tiny, one-room sheds covered with tar paper. On the other claims, two sod houses were built in the spring of 1907 to house the families which were on their way, arriving by immigrant train in June. In one house lived Vincent and Emil's families and, in the other, Joseph and Frank's. More sod houses went up in 1908. A photo showed that one house would win no prize for beauty. It was an ungainly structure bowed out drunkenly in several directions as though threatening to collapse. It was so low to the ground it's questionable if the men could stand upright. (In some sod houses, however, the ground inside was excavated for a foot or two and that may have occurred here to provide headroom.)

Six of the brothers posed in front of the house. Several are in work clothes, two wearing suspenders and another bib overalls. A fourth has a suit coat and two others are attired in ties and long sleeve white shirts. All wear hats, one a cowboy hat, and several sport pipes

Emil's sod house stood on the south bank of a small, unnamed creek, dry except after heavy rains or the spring melt that ran through the farmyard. It was just north of where his future home was to stand and is the site today of a refuse heap.

Drinking water, which had to be hauled in barrels from a homestead five miles west, was a priority and 30 to 40 foot deep wells were dug. Until 1918, mail was delivered in care of a post office known as Cedar which was based in a nearby farm home. After that, it came on a rural route out of Mott. (Emil once left Frank a homemade sausage in his mailbox. Unfortunately, the mailman arrived first and, thinking the sausage a gift to him, happily took it home.)

Charles went back to Minnesota to escort his wife and five

younger children west, returning via the Northern Pacific to Gladstone where he was met by a wagon driven by Emil and Vincent. In the fall of 1907, Charles returned once more to Minnesota for two sons, Jim and Prokop, who had been staying with relatives, and his livestock (four horses, four cows, several young pigs and some chickens), farm equipment, and household goods. While his oldest daughter, Anna, stayed in Minnesota with her grandparents to attend school another year, the three males came west in the same box car as their animals and possessions. At Lake Park, MN., the train was involved in a head-on collision with another train and Charles was thrown out of the box car when the door burst open. But the only damage was a cook stove which the railroad replaced.

The other brothers, with the exception of Louis who stayed behind to watch over the families on the isolated homestead, also returned to Minnesota that fall of 1907 to wrap up work on their Minnesota farms and collect the remainder of their belongings. In the case of Barbara, an attractive woman, a full length mirror she had received as a wedding present came west to the sod hut.

Left behind were the graves of several infants who died at or near birth. No records show where they lie, although Renville County officials say they occasionally come across an unexpected coffin in their cemeteries when new graves are dug.

In 1908, having met the homestead requirements by living 14 months on their 160 acres, building a residence, and cultivating land, the two single brothers, Louis and James, paid the government \$1.25 to \$2.50 an acre, took title, and moved on. This was known as commuting a homestead and was a popular technique to gain quick ownership. Many settlers had no intention of permanently becoming farmers, but were only speculators.

The other Svihovec brothers took a more time-consuming, but less expensive route to ownership. After living on the land for five years, they got free title to it from the government in 1912.

Different Directions for the Brothers

James moved to Minneapolis where he often roomed with his brother Rudolph and where he changed his last name to reflect the spelling adopted earlier by Rudolph -- Svihove. He worked at sales jobs with the National Financing Syndicate and Northwestern Hotel Brokerage and Realty.

Louis went to Mandan, ND, where he was joined by Frank Sr. and Barbara who had followed their sons to North Dakota. The parents had \$4,000 from selling 80 acres of their Minnesota land in March 1910. At this point, they were in their 60s and the hard, uncertain life of a homesteader was unthinkable. As a result, they stopped in Mandan, home to a small colony of other Bohemians, and

found a tiny home at 311 4th Avenue Northeast, a corner lot a few blocks north of the business district. Louis lived with them and so, for a time, did a granddaughter -- Charles' daughter Stella -- who took care of the ailing grandmother.

Louis began clerking in the Foran Grocery owned by Mayor John Foran. By 1915, perhaps with financing from his parents, Louis was the owner. The store was on the city's main commercial street at 102 East Main. Louis' newspaper ads described it as a "Dealer in Staple and Fancy Groceries, Crockery, Glassware, Etc. Everything New and Up To Date." In 1916, however, Louis fell ill with pneumonia and died Jan. 17. In noting his death, the Adams County Record called him "a prominent Mandan merchant." He was 29 and had planned to marry in two months.

1916 was an unhappy year as the family was shaken by another death. The family matriarch, 71-year-old Barbara, was ill many weeks and then suffered a series of paralyzing strokes, dying a week later, October 10.

Stella stayed on in Mandan, keeping house for her grandfather and uncle, James, who had returned from Minneapolis. Her sister, Ema, stayed with them for two years while attending Mandan High. Although Mott had a high school, it was a long trip there from the Svihovec farms.

Grandfather Frank's one chore in his retirement years was to take care of Sam, the horse used for grocery deliveries from his sons' store. Much of the rest of his time was spent reading. When he was younger, he had played the violin. He's recalled as a handsome man who was always well-groomed, with brown eyes, black hair, a moustache and sideburns. When he attended church, he carried a cane and wore a long, black coat with a velvet trim collar, a Hamburg hat, and kid gloves.

After Louis' death, James took over the store's management and ran it in conjunction with a man named Joseph Baron until 1920 when he sold the business. Moving back to Minneapolis, he worked in a variety of sales jobs before beginning in 1931 to operate a series of small, neighborhood groceries. A marriage produced one child, Gerald (Jerry). Until James' death in the mid-1940s, the family lived in apartments connected to whatever store they might happen to be running at the time. Jerry later further shortened his last name, from Svihowe to Howe.

Another death was that of the oldest son of Frank Jr. George was in his early 20s when he died in 1919 during the great worldwide flu epidemic.

In 1920, an aging, ailing Frank Sr. moved to his sons' homesteads where the plan was for him to rotate among them. But, finding most of his daughters-in-law disagreeable, he spent the greater share of his time at Emil and Barbara's. Falling ill

shortly after arriving, he lived in poor health for six months and died Jan. 15, 1921. He was buried at Mandan's Union Cemetery next to his wife and son, Louis. He was 83.

Accompanying his father's body on the train to Mandan for the funeral at St. Joseph's Church, Emil was taken seriously ill with pneumonia and was hospitalized at St. Alexius in Bismarck. In later years, Emil came down with pneumonia twice more. To bring down his fever on one occasion, his sons used snow that had survived the winter buried in a haystack.

Joseph, apparently unable to make a success of the homestead, sold his North Dakota land and one-room house in the fall of 1916 to Joseph Komenda and bought, sight unseen, a rocky farm near Stacey, MN, north of St. Paul. The decision turned out disastrously and his financial fortunes fell further. Often, the family had only lard sandwiches to eat and relied heavily on hunting small game like rabbits and squirrels for food. His son, Tony, died of pneumonia later that same year at age 12. Those calamities affected him and in 1917 his young daughter, Alice, found his body hanging in the barn. His death illustrates a sober statistic -- the suicide rate for Czech-American farmers was higher than average. His widow, Anna, took her daughter, moved to St. Paul and was forced to take a job in a meat packing plant. Joseph's brother, Rudolph, reportedly aided her financially. In later years, Anna worked in department stores and, after Alice married, lived with her the rest of her life. Although all track of Anna and Alice was lost to the family decades ago, some of their descendants were relocated in the mid-1990s and more earlier this year. Some still live in Minnesota.

Daily Life on the Farm

Even with the departure of Joseph's family, two dozen Svihovec children lived within a mile of each other. A one room grade school was constructed, opening sometime between 1907 and 1909. Naturally it was unofficially called the Svihovec School. An early photo, taken about 1912, shows 24 students -- 20 of them Svihovecs or relatives. In addition to classes, the building was used as a polling place and for dances and community gatherings. And the young adults took advantage of it to produce a play there: "Aaron Slick from Punkin Crick."

Grade school was the most education the boys received, but some of the girls went on to high school, usually staying in Mott in order to do so. Emily and Adeline, for instance, first roomed in a private home for two months for which Emil paid \$8 and then with their brother Ted and his wife Helen and finally with their older sister, Blanche, who was by that time married to Bud Sloan. Emil, of course, reimbursed Ted and Blanche for the girls' board and room. Earlier, Sylvia had also boarded in town. Some started

their education young. After her mother's death, Blanche, who was responsible for the younger children, was forced to take four-year-old Adeline to school with her. After a few days, the teacher sighed and simply enrolled Adeline as a first grader.

The school's last teacher was Doris BJORNDahl. After she married Milo in 1939, the school closed. Its bell ended up at The Curve, a night club outside Mott owned by Vincent's daughter, Agnes, and her husband, Harry Hintz. There it was used for more than a quarter-century to summon diners from the bar when their meals were ready. When the Curve temporarily passed out of the family's ownership, the bell disappeared and the disappointed family's efforts to track it down proved fruitless. (Although The Curve, now called the Final-Go-Round, has changed ownership a number of times, it once again is owned by a Svihovec descendant - Larry and Racheal Rieker.) The school itself was sold for use as a granary and moved to a farm north of Mott.

Emil had what was considered a third grade education in Bohemia -- equivalent to an eighth grade diploma in the U.S. Knowing it was critical to success in America, all the Svihovecs raised their children to speak English and few grew up knowing any more than a few words of Czech. An avid reader, Emil subscribed to a daily newspaper, the Mandan Pioneer, and a Czech language paper from Omaha.

One reason he had time to read was that his children did most of the work. Emil contented himself with other matters -- financial affairs; an occasional bit of cooking, with fried fish a specialty; keeping the stove burning on winter nights; raising vegetables and flowers, including morning glories and rose bushes; using a long-handled scythe to keep weeds down in the yard and road ditches; sharpening knives with a foot-powered grindstone; maintaining the well and windmill (and insisting that the stock watering tank be kept immaculately clean); feeding the hogs; resoling the family's shoes; and late winter germination tests. Taking samples of grain from each bin, he would put them in separate pie tins, add moisture, and watch to see which batch had the highest sprouting percentage. That determined which seed was used for spring planting.

Although wheat was the key crop, Emil also raised flax, barley, oats, and corn. About three dozen head of dairy cows, two dozen hogs, 15 to 16 horses, and a flock of chickens composed the livestock. In exchange for groceries, a cow would be slaughtered and the meat sold by McNeill's Market in Mott. Roving cattle buyers would stop at the farm and the animals they purchased would be driven by horseback by the boys to Regent or the stockyards at Mott. So that it could be finished by dark, those mini-trail drives would have to be started well before dawn. The same schedule was true of wagon trips to deliver grain to the elevators.

All the farm work and transportation were handled by horses

until the 1920s when the first tractor arrived, a McCormick-Deering. Otto drove it home and the students at the Svihovec School rushed out to see the wondrous sight. Among them was Rud who smiled as this symbol of family prosperity chugged by, thinking proudly to himself, "Someday I'll drive that."

The first combine, also a McCormick-Deering, appeared the summer of 1929, purchased from the Mott Supply for \$1,600. That was also the year Emil purchased a new truck, a Chevrolet, replacing a used Ford Model T he had obtained in the mid-1920s.

Entertainment came in a variety of ways. Several of the men, including Uncle Frank and Emil, belonged to the Cannon Ball Lodge of the Zapadni Cesko-Bratrska Jednota (Western Bohemian Fraternal Association) in Regent and members would occasionally meet at the farm where Emil, the secretary, stored the members' ceremonial tin cups. Milo and Teddy were avid hunters, pursuing pheasants, grouse, ducks, partridge, geese and antelope. Baseball games against the Norwegian neighbors were the favorite sport, played almost every Sunday when the weather was good. Charles was the team's catcher, complete with face mask, chest protector and a steady stream of chatter.

Dances were especially popular. Otto and Ted were noted for their dancing, but Emil, too, loved to dance and both his house and big barn loft and also the Svihovec School were the site of many a night of music. Men were charged admission to Emil's barn dances and lunches and pop were sold from a V-shaped counter made from two planks. Babies were stashed on beds in the house. After the dances, Emil would take a lantern and carefully go through the barn to ensure there was no chance of a fire starting. Just as carefully the next day, the family's little girls, Emily and Adeline, would go through it looking for lost coins.

Bohemians are famous connoisseurs of beer and the Svihovecs no exception. Emil would make his own, saving old beer bottles to refill with his home brew. To clean out the old containers, pebbles would be dropped in, water added, and they would be shaken and swirled until crystal clear.

Sometimes the beer caused problems. Otto imbibed too freely on one occasion and Teddy tried to take away the keys to the family car to prevent him driving to Mott. Otto won the argument, but never got to Mott, losing control of the car on a curve on a gravel road outside town. Emil, who had been in Bismarck to see his second wife, then recovering from appendicitis, exclaimed, "My God, my wife's in the hospital and I come home and the car's wrecked."

One evening, Frank, after a night of elbow bending with his brother Emil, happily set out for home. But, when he came to the crossroads, he turned the wrong direction and ended up at the Svihovec School. Realizing his error, he sternly reprimanded himself, saying, "Frank, you go that way." Then, following his

own pointed finger, he made his unsteady way home.

Skating took place on the creek bottoms, although the skaters often broke through the ice, and skiing with barrel staves was enjoyed on the Pandy Hills. One winter, hearing their Norwegian neighbors were regularly sled riding on the tall buttes, the Svihovecs set off to try their luck. After a harrowing ride down precipitous inclines, they caught their breath, painfully checked their wounds, and expressed admiration of the Norwegians who braved injury on these slopes. It was only later they discovered that the more cautious, and certainly wiser, Norwegians never sled all the way down from the top, but only used the gentler reaches at the base of the butte.

Winters often meant isolation. When they absolutely had to go to town, when perhaps a child was ill, vehicles were filled with men and, as they reached each drift, all hands jumped out to shovel. As winter closed down the countryside, a root cellar was filled with potatoes and 400 pounds of flour stockpiled. In addition to winter sports, the hours were filled telling stories and playing cards. Ted and Otto are remembered for spirited card games punctuated with shouts and Czech curses. During one match, Otto struck the table forcibly enough to break it.

Emil was a gifted storyteller and Frank's family would hitch horses to a sleigh, fill it with heated rocks for warmth, and come over to Emil's for a night of tall tales. Cradling the smallest child, Adeline, on his lap, Emil would regale his audience with tales of Buffalo Bill or the supernatural, pausing dramatically to slowly relight his pipe at suspenseful points.

He had as many as ten pipes, some curved and some with unusually long stems. Prince Albert tobacco was his preferred smoke, but he appreciated an occasional cigar. In later years, he grew a moustache long enough to hide several missing teeth.

As the century advanced and technology developed, Emil had one of the first radios. And in 1925, he signed up as a member of the Pleasant Valley Telephone Company of which his brother Charles was president.

In 1928, Emil backed Democratic presidential nominee Al Smith over Republican Herbert Hoover, dramatically, but presciently, warning friends and neighbors that, "If Hoover gets in, all is lost."

During another campaign, a candidate for Hettinger County states attorney named J.K. Murray slipped Emil \$20 and suggested he buy drinks for his Bohemian friends in Regent and urge them to vote for Murray. Emil, however, supported R.J. Bloedau for the job. To Bloedau's enduring appreciation, Emil never quite got around to campaigning for Murray. No record exists of what happened to the \$20.

The family never missed a holiday. In the spring, it would drive to Mott, the town which, with Regent, was its trading center, for Memorial Day services, often stopping for a grape pop from the town's bottling plant. Later that summer, they would catch Mott's Fourth of July celebration and always made it to the county fair and carnival in the fall.

The first car arrived in the 1920s, a Willys Knight open touring auto with leather upholstery. On excursions, Emil would drive and Otto act as co-pilot while the rest of the family crowded together in the back. On less important trips, Emil would take Milo along so he would have someone to step on the starter while he was out front, cranking the engine to get it running. In later years, Adeline treasured being the only passenger (along with her doll) when Emil made business trips to Regent.

Teasing was common. At Easter time, Teddy would shoulder his gun and, frightening the youngest children, announce he was off to kill the Easter bunny. When the playhouse was found in disarray, Rud slyly speculated a tornado had hit. When the dolls' diapers turned up full of mustard, Teddy, the usual suspect, was identified as the prankster. It was Teddy again who made the surprising announcement that the family's black and white cat, Felix, has mysteriously turned completely black during the night. To prove it, he presented a black cat. The young children accepted this miracle until it was revealed that Ted had brought the animal home from a night of partying.

Emil loved animals and the family has warm memories of their pets -- the horses Colonel and Dolly, the part-German Shepherd Ranger who was especially attached to Emil, the amazingly fertile mother cat Felix, the black and white dog Rex, Sylvia's pet pig Suzie, and Adeline's pet calf Hope and pet sheep, both of which, to her understandable distress, ended up sent to slaughter.

Emily was crazy about horses and loved cats all her life. Attached to one, she carried it everywhere. Although it was suggested she was smothering the animal with love, she ignored recommendations she allow it some freedom. One day, when the cat was frantic to free itself, someone pointed out it might have to go to the bathroom. Emily rejected that, saying, "It's only pretending it has to go." A few moments later, the cat emptied its bowels on Emily's dress. A mortified little girl told no one, but slipped down to the horse watering tank, disrobed, and scrubbed out her dress.

Sylvia had been taught to ride horse by Rud, but it was a messy ordeal. She repeatedly fell off and developed a knack for landing in piles of manure.

The children suffered their share of horseback mishaps. Milo, an accomplished horseman, had his collarbone broke when he was

bucked off and Sylvia broke her wrist when her horse, Kelly, was frightened by a snake. As a result, Emil forbid his younger children from riding horse. Whenever his car disappeared over the hill, however, Emily dashed to the barn to saddle a horse. Often, she would be happy simply to sit on its back as it placidly grazed about the farmyard.

Life on the homestead was hard, and Emil had regrets about the move from Minnesota. "If I had known," he said years later, "what I was going to be putting my family through, I never would have come out here." But the families' situations slowly improved. An important step was when the sod houses were abandoned and frame homes built.

Rud and Blanche were born in the sod hut, but Barbara gave birth to her last four in the family's new two-story home which was built in 1912 or 1913. An addition that doubled its size was added in the early 1920s.

Shortly after the home's completion, the family gathered in front for a portrait. The oldest child, ten-year-old Otto, stands next to his father. Emil, the ever present pipe in mouth, hands on hips, stands a few steps from the remainder of his family. Barbara, hair pulled back in a bun, holds two-year-old Sylvia on her lap while the family dog sits at her side. Behind her on one side, dressed identically in bib overalls are Charles and Teddy. On the other side, standing together, are Rud in a white shirt and Blanche in a white dress and with ribbons in her hair.

Resting on a fieldstone foundation, the house was a modest residence. Unlike Uncle Charles' home which, while also small, was graced by a handsome front porch and architectural detailing, Emil and Barbara's home was unadorned, without ornamentation of any kind. Initially, it had only three rooms -- an upstairs bedroom, a combined kitchen-living room taking up most of the first floor, and a small, adjacent side room. An attached entry shed, a pantry under the stairs, and a dug out basement completed the interior. After an addition was added, the home gained a separate living room, a downstairs bedroom, and a second upstairs bedroom. On the second floor, the boys slept in the north room and the girls in the south. Unlike Uncle Charles' home, which had the luxury of a furnace, Emil and Barbara's was warmed only by the cookstove and by a heater in the living room. Coal came from an underground mine run by their neighbors, the Komendas, and from strip mines further away.

Uncle Charles' frame house, meanwhile, went up in 1914 and, with a modern addition, is still lived in today by his granddaughter, Arlyce Frieze, and her husband, John. Uncle Frank's home was erected about 1912. All the homes, including Uncle Vincent's residence and the one-room house of Uncle Joseph, were still standing at the turn of the century.

Unlike some children in the area who suffered from malnutrition, the Svihovecs ate well. There was plenty of turkey and fresh chicken; garden produce and plums, buffalo berries and chokecherries the family picked themselves; crates of fruit -- apples, grapes, pears; and several Bohemian specialties -- sausage, knedlichky (Czech for dumpling) and stuffed buns known as kolachies, a delicacy which became the national food for Bohemians in America. One food, however, was banned. Emil saw peanut butter as an economic competitor to the butter his cows produced and forbid it in his house.

During harvest, threshing crews would move from farm to farm and Barbara would take her turn cooking for them, making chocolate pies for dessert.

There was, of course, work. Wild mustard had to be picked from the fields until the children's arms ached. Milo would bring in the cattle for milking after they grazed at night. Each morning when the alarm went off, Milo and the dog, Ranger, would go out to handle that assignment. One morning, Milo overslept, but heard the screen door slam. Looking out the window, he discovered Ranger, who had long ago learned to let himself out of the house, on his solitary way to bring the cattle home. From then on, Milo had it made. Each morning he'd just shout, "Ranger, go get the cows" and Ranger was off. One morning, forgetting that the animals had been moved to a new pasture, Milo gave Ranger the normal command. Naturally, Ranger couldn't find the cattle and returned empty pawed. Irritated, Milo ordered him back out: "Go get those cows!" A desperate Ranger returned to the pasture and, doing the best he could, soon reappeared, driving into the milking barn several indignant horses.

Emily's job was to gather eggs. Hens intent on trying to hatch chicks would resent her efforts and refuse to move. Emily's solution was simple. She would seize a stick and brain the hens, beating them into near senselessness.

Each child, of course, had an individual personality and one can begin to understand how Emily got her reputation for naughtiness. Milo and Sylvia had rebellious natures while Teddy was known for devilment and Charles for kindness, good humor, and warmth. Even in adulthood, Charles carried that reputation, with one county official calling him the best liked man in Mott.

There were hazards. Late one summer, lightning struck Uncle Frank's winter supply of hay, destroying it. Uncle Charles' steer, fattened in preparation for slaughter for a winter meat supply, fell in the well and drown. Uncle Charles' three-year-old son, Albert, toppled into a bucket of lime whitewash and was blinded. After praying constantly for three weeks, his mother thanked God when the toddler recovered. One close call occurred when Sylvia and other family members, returning from town in a buckboard wagon pulled by two horses, were caught by a winter storm. Unable to

proceed, they found sanctuary at the Svihovec School.

The Economics of Farming

Just as it does today, survival in the uncertain world of agriculture meant constant visits to lenders. In 1911, Emil and Barbara took out a five-year \$600 mortgage on their new homestead from the Fargo Loan Agency. Another mortgage to the First National Bank of Mandan was paid off after the harvest in 1916. In 1922, they visited the new Bank of North Dakota, a novel experiment in socialism by the radical populist farmers of the NonPartisan League, and obtained a mortgage at 6.5 percent for \$1,250. It was paid off in 1925.

In 1930, Emil turned to his Czech lodge and mortgaged a quarter (160 acres) with it for \$300. The next year, he mortgaged another quarter, borrowing \$500 at 6 percent from neighbors Katy and Christian Potzner. As the Depression set in, he borrowed \$2,600 at 3 percent in order to, among other things, pay off the Potznors and the lodge.

Federal farm programs geared up to assist desperate farmers and Emil took advantage. In 1933, he signed up for the new wheat allotment. In 1934, he borrowed \$1,000 from the Regional Agricultural Credit Corp. and, in exchange for \$123, also turned over ten of his cows under what was known as the Public Voucher and Emergency Cattle Agreement. He benefitted from a federal Corn-Hog Reduction Contract by selling his swine to the government for a nominal price. That was followed by the sale of 24 cows and six calves to USDA's Federal Surplus Relief Corp.

In 1936, he obtained a one-year \$400 mortgage from USDA's Resettlement Administration. As a side benefit, he became eligible for emergency medical care from the North Dakota Farmers Mutual Aid Corp. for himself, wife, and minor children.

Later that year, he took out two one-year mortgages, one for \$250 from the Mott bank and another for \$400 from the North Dakota Rural Rehabilitation program. In doing so, he put up collateral that gives us a picture of his situation. As livestock, he listed one red bull, seven red cows, two mares ages 5 and 14, one spring colt and three geldings ages 4, 10 and 12. The machinery consisted of that McCormick-Deering tractor and combine; Rosenthal corn shredder; three wagons; four more pieces of McCormick equipment - a hay rake, mower, tandem disc, and tractor plow; and three pieces of John Deere equipment -- a grain binder, manure spreader, and grain elevator.

In the mid-1930s, he also had a \$1,000 loan from the Federal Land Bank.

The brothers slowly expanded. In 1914, Uncle Charles bought a quarter of land two miles north. In 1917, he and Uncle Vince each bought a quarter of Section 13, the block of what had been railroad land that the brothers' original homesteads surrounded. Uncle Vince's quarter was directly east of his farm house and Uncle Charles' directly north of his farm. Each paid \$3,100. Later that year, Uncle Charles sold the quarter he had bought in 1914 to his son, James, for the same amount he had originally paid, \$2,600. Then Uncle Charles bought two more quarters adjacent to his farmstead, the one on the west side in 1922 and the one on the south side in 1928, paying \$1,800 for the latter.

In 1924, Emil bought the quarter directly east of his farm for \$1,600. Two years later, the last quarter of that railroad section was claimed by the Svihovec clan, purchased by Uncle Frank for \$2,000. It was immediately south of his farmstead. It was 1928 when Emil bought the quarter northwest of his home farm for \$2,250 and a quarter southwest of Uncle Charles' homestead. The next year Emil bought still another quarter, one immediately west of his farmstead, and paid \$1,600. Because Otto was the oldest son, the two quarters west and northwest of the farmstead were purchased for him. In the 1930s, Emil also farmed a half section of rented land just south of the farm.

Some idea of his expansion and yields can be gathered by the history of his wheat planting reported when he signed up for the farm program. In 1928, he had 220 acres and a glorious 20 bushel average at harvest. In 1929, there were 245 acres, but a miserable 7 bushel average. In 1930, it was 225 acres and just a 6 bushel an acre crop. In 1931, he went up to 325 acres, but only averaged a desperate 2 bushels. For 1932, he had 400 acres and a decent 16 bushels. Then, in 1933, the last year for which these figures are available, he had 461 acres of wheat, more than twice what he had planted in the late 1920s, but his average was only 4 bushels.

In 1932 and 33, his farming operation totalled seven quarters. Of that, 395 acres were pasture. In those two years, he averaged 445 acres in wheat, 130 in barley, 47 in corn, and 30 in oats. Emil's operation was almost twice the size of the typical farm in the area. It would be another 25-30 years before the average farm in Adams and Hettinger counties would equal his 1,120 acres of the early 1930s.

Death and the Depression

Tragedy struck during the Christmas holiday of 1923. Barbara took ill and, when Regent's beloved Dr. Simon Hill was called out, he misdiagnosed her illness and recommended hot packs be kept around her body. The women of the family worked frantically to follow his instructions and the house filled with steam as they rushed back and forth from the kitchen, heating

material for the hot packs. Unfortunately, Barbara was suffering from appendicitis and heat was the wrong treatment, only exacerbating the problem. Her appendix burst and she was rushed to the hospital in Dickinson and underwent an operation Christmas Day. With Emil at her bedside, she died there Dec. 26 and was buried on Blanche's birthday, Dec. 28.

The extended family was stunned. More than 70 years later, one niece, Uncle Charles' daughter Ema, remembered it as "one of the saddest days of my life. We were devastated." Like many relatives, she recalled Barbara with fondness, calling her "a lovely person, my favorite aunt! She was kind and gentle and loved all you kids and your dad."

Woefully, Rud cried out, "Now when I want something, who am I going to ask?"

On the East Coast, her sisters were bitter, blaming Emil. "He took that lovely flower out on the prairie and let her die," they complained many years later to a visiting relative.

For years, a resentful Otto would curse when Dr. Hill's name came up.

(In later years, Dr. Hill never charged Adeline for prescriptions or medical visits, gestures she interpreted as an apology, an attempt to make amends.)

Left with two-year-old Adeline, four-year-old Emily, seven-year-old Milo and nine-year-old Sylvia to care for, Emil pressed his oldest daughter, Blanche, only 12 and no more than a child herself, into service as a surrogate mother. Although she was spared the clothes washing which Emil took to a laundress and the cooking duties Emil himself assumed, this was a painful time for a young girl who had suddenly lost her mother and found herself with an adult's burdens -- child rearing, butter churning, household chores. For the remainder of her life, she avoided talking about it. During this period, Blanche was regularly taken to Mandan by her father so clothes could be bought her with the assistance of female friends of the family. Even these trips, what should have been bright spots, turned sour, for Blanche hated the dresses chosen for her.

Two years later, Emil set sail for Bohemia, determined to find a bride, a mother for his children. He visited his home village, but came back empty handed. And, he noted, they considered him a liar there, refusing to believe he had bought a tractor, owned a car, and farmed acreage vaster than any of them dared believe possible. That Emil was prepared and able to finance the trip illustrates both the prosperity of his farm during those years and the desperation of his search for a wife.

Back in North Dakota and still wife hunting, Emil decided to

take the nearest available possibility, his sister-in-law Anna, a woman two years older than himself. Her husband, Uncle Vincent, had died of pernicious anemia Jan. 6, 1922. Emil married Anna at St. Wenceslaus' Church, a Bohemian parish in Dickinson Nov. 20, 1928, with Frank and Rosie Svihovec witnesses.

His children decided they had not gotten a mother, but a woman referred to bitterly as "the old lady." She was a good cook and hard worker, but unable to express warmth toward Emil's children. Although she never harmed them, they lived in dread. In early morning, the children would lay in bed, ears alert. If all was quiet, they relaxed. But if they heard muttered oaths and doors banging, they faced what they called "a bad day."

There were questionable ways to settle the score. One day, after repeated trips to bring in buckets of corn cobs for fuel for the stove where Anna was baking, Emily filled the bucket with dirt lumps, disguised the contents with a few corn cobs on top and watched as Anna unwittingly dumped the dirt on her fire.

Another day, with her head in the cream separator as she washed it, Emily complained to Adeline about their situation. Although Emily didn't realize their father was approaching, Adeline saw him and, struck dumb, stood horrified as Emily expressed resentment against the stepmother. "And," concluded Emily, "one of these days I am going to tell Dad, too."

"Just keep your mouths shut," said Emil, turning and walking away.

But Emil knew the situation was troubling. On a trip to Mandan to care for his family's cemetery plot, an annual chore at which he and his brother Charles took turns, Emil confessed to a friend that the marriage was "one of the biggest mistakes I made. The grief I have brought on to my children."

The Depression added to the woes. The rain stopped and grasshoppers came in numbers so horrifying they resembled a Stephen King novel. A neighbor's horse came home covered by the insects. Only its eyes and mouth could be seen. It died in two hours. In August of 1933, Mott turned on its street lights when grasshopper swarms blotted out the sun. Temperatures in North Dakota in 1936 set records at both ends of the thermometer and they still stand -- 121 above and 60 below. Drought killed Emil's rose bushes and poplar trees. There were no crops for eight years. Instead of European voyages, land purchases, and new machinery, every cent was husbanded. Rud was sent to work on the nearby Komenda farm where he was paid 50 cents a day, money he had to turn over to his father to keep the farm functioning. The children wore second-hand clothes. When Christmas came, there was only one gift per child and, in exchange, the children had to give up an old toy to even poorer neighbors. When it was a much loved doll shipped down the road, tears flowed.

Toys were scarce. The only one Milo can recall, and one in which he delighted, was a mechanical black man which, when wound up, would dance a jig. Instead of toys, there were pets, especially the numerous kittens. An abandoned Essex auto and a playhouse became favorite hangouts. When Blanche and Rud played together, they employed stones as toys -- long rocks were horses and round ones cows. Blanche and Rud, only a year apart in age, also spent extensive periods on horseback herding cattle and grew close during those long hours together, sharing a special relationship all their lives.

The children began to make lives for themselves. Ted, who became a barber, prepared by practicing on his youngest siblings. Embarrassed at the results, Emily and Adeline hid under a table.

The family of Emil's son Charles was star-crossed. His two-month-old son, Darrell, died of a bowel obstruction in the spring of 1934 and then his 27-year-old wife, Vivian Alkire, a former teacher in the Svihovec School, passed away Feb. 3, 1935. The surviving children, Joan, Elaine, Eugene and Valerie, went to live with Vivian's parents at Thunder Hawk, S.D., as Charles tried to make a living in the depths of the Depression.

He shared his rented farm five miles south of Mott with an acquaintance, Ferdinand "Freddie" Miller. Charles' crop had failed and, on Election Day 1936, Charles and Miller lunched with Emil and Blanche and discussed plans to leave the next day, Charles for a visit with his children and Miller for California. The next afternoon, however, neighbors noticed the house afire and the Mott Volunteer Fire Department quickly arrived. Noting two bodies in the house, by then engulfed in flames, firemen used grappling hooks and pulled them out before the floor collapsed into the basement.

The badly burned corpses were taken to Mott for an autopsy by Dr. Hill, Dr. O.C. Maercklein, and the newly re-elected states attorney, R.J. Bloedau. Miller was found with an unidentified wound in his head and a bullet hole through his lungs while Charles had a bullet wound in his heart.

A guard, Charles' cousin Rufus Svihovec, was posted at the site while the remains of the house, now only burned rubble filling the cellar, were sifted and a mysterious .32 revolver discovered. Parked in the yard were both men's cars, packed for their trips. Miller's car had a purse with \$300 and Charles' contained his clothes and a crate of live chickens.

A murder-suicide theory was proposed, with suspicion falling first on one man and then the other. However, there was also good reason for believing it a double murder. Because of the odd angle the bullet entered Charles' heart, it was generally accepted he could not have committed suicide and, therefore, would not have been the murderer. But the authorities could never determine what

occurred and it remains an unsolved mystery.

In his obituary, the Mott paper called Charles "a pleasant young man who enjoyed the friendship of a large number of people." Although he had life insurance, the company refused to pay benefits to his orphans, arguing that the policy didn't cover murders or suicides.

Two years later, Emil began suffering terribly from head pains. After a stay at St. Alexius Hospital in Bismarck, Emil accepted the recommendation of Dr. E.O. Olesky of Mott who suggested he go to Jamestown where a physician with expertise in brain injuries practiced, apparently at the State Hospital. Fixing up a bed in a car, Rud, joined by a woman with nursing skills, Jennie Sloan, took Emil to Jamestown. The dog Ranger, uneasy at his master's illness, whimpered as the car pulled away. Emil died in Jamestown Dec. 21, 1938, of a brain hemorrhage complicated by pneumonia.

It was another grim holiday as the family's father was buried Christmas Eve.

At the time, Emil owned three quarters and the family farmed four more with Otto owning two of those. Although Otto had repeatedly urged him to prepare one, Emil had no will. The only liquid asset was an insurance policy Emil had in order to belong to the Czech lodge and for which he had made Emily and Adeline beneficiaries. The policy was for \$500, the lowest amount possible, and Emil had borrowed \$90 against it during those Depression days. Still, that left \$410 to assist Emily and her new husband, Hugo Auer, and to let Adeline achieve her dream of college. Rud, however, informed the girls that since no one had any money, the funeral would have to be paid from their inheritance. After paying that and being left with just \$180, the two young women were astounded when the parish priest, Fr. Camillus Seiler, told them he had been contacted by their stepmother and they must turn over the remaining sum to her. They refused. Instead, Emily lent Adeline her \$90 and, with that and her own \$90, Adeline was able to finish college and get a teaching job.

Four of Emil's brothers survived him. James died in the 1940s. Rudolph passed away Sept. 7, 1947, and was buried in St. Paul. Charles, who had retired to Hettinger in 1944, died from a fall Oct. 3, 1949. His wife, Anna, died Dec. 9, 1962, at age 89. Frank died of kidney failure in 1954. Louis, of course, had died in 1916; Joseph on May 21, 1917; Vincent in 1922; and Edward Oct. 5, 1929. Edward's wife, Terezie, died at 80 on Sept. 16, 1952.

The Legacy

The simultaneous homesteading of seven brothers at one site was an especially unusual situation, perhaps unprecedented in the American West, and remarked on in newspaper accounts over the years. Despite the passing of these brothers, most of the land remains in the hands of family members. Even the homestead Uncle Joseph had given up on and sold to a neighbor was bought back by Milo in 1963. However, Uncle Frank's homestead was sold to a neighboring farmer by one of his descendants a few years ago. Only one Svihovec descendant, Arlyce Frieze (with her husband John) is actively farming any of the land today. The rest is rented out by descendants or enrolled by them in a government land retirement plan known as the Conservation Reserve Program.

At the center of the Svihovec holdings is Flag Hill with its concrete monument to the seven homesteading brothers. Built by Rudolph in 1977 and dedicated that year at a Svihovec reunion attended by 220 family members from 15 states, it consists of a granite marker, flagpole, evergreen plantings, classic farm machinery, and ten sealed vaults which each contain mementos for one of the families. In the year 2007, the 100th anniversary of the homesteads, the vaults will be opened.

Only one of Emil's children survive: Adeline Carvell of Mott, ND. In addition to Charles' murder described earlier, the deaths of his other children occurred Sept. 3, 1941, when Ted died of heart disease and bronchial pneumonia in a Bismarck hospital; Sept. 30, 1976, when Blanche Sloan died at Fargo of cancer; Dec. 14, 1990, when Emily Auer died of cancer in a nursing home at Richardton, ND; in 1993 when Otto died Feb. 28 at the hospital in Hettinger, ND, and Rud on March 10 of a fall at his daughter's home in Bismarck; Dec. 9, 1996, when Sylvia Prescott died of cancer in Michigan where she had lived all her adult life; and March 25, 2007, when Milo passed away in a nursing home in Casper, WY.

Their children, the fourth American generation, total 30, two of whom died in childhood. And their children, the fifth generation, one that's now likely complete, total 77, one of whom died in childhood. And still being formed, the sixth generation has 88 members. The seventh generation has three members: Joshua and Dylan Lee of Scio, OR., and Blake Knaup of Bismarck, ND. Those three are all great-great-grandchildren of Charles and Vivian Svihovec.

In its own quiet and private way, the Svihovec experience in America, now 121 years along, reflects those of millions of fellow immigrants, natives of a hundred nations who continue even today, more than a century later, to follow their dreams, to pour into the promised land. The promise can turn perfidious, the dream dusty, but the flow continues. One might consider the Svihovec family an average clan and their experiences in America as ordinary, as typical. But the truth was that every family had a singular adventure. None of their stories was commonplace and none identical. Each was in its own way both extraordinary and

fascinating, a tale of determination, of foolhardiness, of wisdom and farsightedness, of desperation, of courage. The Svihovec saga has elements of all those and its story continues.