Chapter 1

Introduction

FOREWORD

My research on the acculturation of Czech and Moravian peasant immigrants in Texas started where the immigrant journey ended—at the cemetery. On a sweltering day in March I set out from San Antonio to Praha along with a Trinity University colleague who needed help with deciphering Czech inscriptions for his analysis of semantic data of gravestones. Homesick for the real Prague back in my homeland, I felt immediately attracted by the curious placename: how could a place in Texas bear the name of a European capital? The road to the cemetery curved around and was lined with trees. As we came near, I could see from a distance endless stretches of land dotted with tombstones decorated by reliefs and photographs; dilapidated gravestones as well as elaborate metal crosses of talented artisans and perfectly shaped granite stones covered with Czech writing of various tones. At the cemetery I found the language and culture of a community that once stretched throughout the prairie surrounding the cemetery.

The following week I drove back equipped with a camera and an umbrella against scorching sun. But it started to rain, and by the time I reached Praha it was pouring. (I did not know then that I would be reading volumes in the near future about the sudden swings in Texas weather, including drenching rains, hurricanes, and droughts, in immigrants' memoirs.) I took no photographs that day and thought that was the end of my story. Later that spring I moved to Connecticut; by then I would have gone anywhere to escape the tedious monotony of the Texas landscape and unlivable heat, and so when an offer came from Connecticut College to assume a faculty position, I was ecstatic.

But it turned out that I could not escape Texas so easily. Unanswered questions haunted me: Why would Czechs and Moravians ever want to come to Texas of all places? They could have joined Moravian Brethren and German Deutsch in Pennsylvania, or Czech as well as German settlements in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. What made their situation at home so hopeless that they traded neat villages

with squares shaped by tradition and ancient gems of churches for the Texas prairie? Was it the warm climate or the expansive prairie of fertile blackland that seemed so attractive to those who spent their lives in crowded dwellings, farming on rented subdivided fields? Were they mystified by the freedom of the American frontier? How did they live there and come to terms with the new environment that had no imposing hills, gentle meadows, or quick streams in sight? I traveled back home to the Moravian and Czech villages where the immigrants were born and found them set in mountains or their foothills in a breathtakingly beautiful, romantic countryside; they attract tourists by carefully marked trails and guidebooks describing the scenery, local legends and folk tales, regional music traditions, and the medieval history of the towns and villages. The contrasts between the geography, architecture, and history of the Czech Republic and Texas seemed irreconcilable to me.

Later that summer I met Kateřina. I discovered her letters while searching through old manuscripts in a file on Czech emigrants to Texas in the archives of Prague's Náprstek Museum. I started reading: "Dearly beloved parents! Thank God, we made it to this promised land, having spent sixty-six days on the ocean, which we couldn't stand for another day.… The people are extremely satisfied here and nobody wants to go back to Europe at any cost." Kateřina was as charmed by the wilderness and blooming trees as I was when they first surprised me in January. It was as if I had looked into a mirror! I saw a young woman with children and a husband, all alone in Texas, laden with books, feather beds, furniture, and pots. As the heat set in Kateřina grew pale, thin, and sick; her babies died; "Anglos" seemed to her "uncouth and uncultured"… She convinced her husband to sell the furniture and forget buying a farm/house (as did I), and sailed back to Europe. Thank God they were able to afford it! Kateřina's story moved me and relieved me of my burden: I could relate to her and she felt about Texas 150 years ago the same way I did now, and left it for the same reasons. When I discovered in the archives a fading pencil-written letter with childlike detailed drawings of a cabin and church, I felt compelled to find answers to my questions. The letter was by a Protestant pastor named Chlumský from Veselí in Texas; he was writing home about his new life—about learning to ride a horse, teaching children, and eating meat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. His dedication, daily exhaustion from travel in a country without roads, and reflections about his homeland painted the drama of a

pioneer life. I became determined to reconstruct the story of Czech Texas and unveil the secrets that the gravestones of Praha held. I had to find out how those who died in Texas also lived there.

All who have ever attempted fieldwork on vernacular culture will empathize with my following comments: it was hard, occasionally dangerous, and embarrassing work. I spent day after day driving around central Texas trying to follow directions. I worked in twisted positions and on my knees in order to get the best view of my favorite gravestone along with a flowering bush. I wasted much time running around the cemetery searching for my forgotten umbrella or sunhat, spray bottle (to gain a quick sharp view of a receding inscription), camera, countless pens, notebooks, and car keys. I went from door to door asking about misplaced letters, notes, and postcards that, as I was usually told, were destroyed during an unfortunate fire at the grandparents' house. I encountered curious looks when preferring yellowish notes on paper scraps, letters to the homeland that were never sent, for whatever reason, and ugly newspaper clippings to old hymnals and prayer books. Some mentioned having old letters and diaries but refused to let me see these treasures, perhaps planning to write a book one day, too. I often drove and searched for hours and came out empty-handed. But there were lucky moments, too. An elderly couple who happened to hear of my visit in the area brought me letters from Moravian relatives written in 1884. Happy that I translated the letters into English for them, they allowed me to use them in whatever way I saw fit. I received phone calls inviting me to the homes of immigrant descendants where I was not only given a tour of the farm but also told moving stories in Texas Czech, a dialect that was music to my ears. Exceptional individuals even had arranged old postcards with Czech written on them neatly into picture albums! And then there were those dear souls who shared my passion, collected additional sources in my absence, and opened cabinet file drawers with their treasures so that I could choose "what I like." Without them, this book would never have been written. Rarely did I sit in quiet museum archives searching through files and finding unpublished sources, but these moments were rewarding and restful.

Tombstones and Language

Cemeteries have always held a particular attraction to me. I grew up in Prague, where cemeteries were predictably neat rows of graves with marble and granite gravestones. The graveyards offered me a fascinat-

ing opportunity to journey into history by following cemetery paths and reading inscriptions containing allusions to the world of social classes and hierarchy that the communist regime did not acknowledge. Tradition dictated visits to cemeteries on All Souls Day, Christmas, and Easter, when lit candles, fresh flowers, and wreaths would garnish headstones and borders, which were washed and cleaned of any debris. As one stood by the grave, memories of the departed were recalled. A few times in one's life, one had to pay respect to the venerated Vyšehrad cemetery in Prague, where famous Czech writers, musicians, and others were buried. Cemeteries and tombstones have a historical, ethnic, and linguistic relevance. This is obvious to all who have experienced or lived with memories of wars; after Serbian soldiers knocked down tombstones in Kosovo cemeteries and destroyed the Kosovars' archives, Kosovars, in retaliation, desecrated Serbian cemeteries. In a Russian novel situated in the Chechen region of the Caucasus in the mid-1940s, a ten-year-old boy encounters Soviet soldiers hauling away stones—grave markers from the desecrated cemetery of a Chechen village whose population had been deported and murdered, as the boy learned from a village orphan.[1] The graveyard was destroyed to erase part of history, annihilate the collective memory of the place, and disclaim the rights of a community to the land. A cemetery is a visual chronicle of a community and its inner relations, established to create a permanent record of names and dates. As a consequence of destroying such records, ethnic groups are severed from the land and their historical right to it, and individuals become homeless and irrelevant.

Tombstones and their inscriptions provide a fresh perspective on history, a perspective that, perhaps, would not naturally suggest itself to a historian but certainly to a linguist. Language contains our history, and the language of tombstones in the cemeteries of central Texas contains the history of Czech immigrants. Czech inscriptions are prevalent in all regions where Czechs were once settled. As believing people they could not have buried their dead in unconsecrated ground. The presence of a cemetery is a reliable indicator of the settlement that once enveloped it. The mapping out of cemeteries where mostly Czechs lie thus reveals the contours of Czech Texas.

Although the language of tombstones is fragmented, especially in the more recent stones, this language includes signals revealing social and cultural changes that once occurred in the community. These signals cannot be contested. Language does not exist or change on its

own, but reveals the inner struggle of individuals and the community in negotiating their adjusted identity, shifts in affiliation with their ethnic or American group, and changes in speakers' needs associated with languages available in the community. One cannot, of course, reconstruct the history of a community out of the few maps, language fragments, and contextless ethnic signals that remain. But I propose that they provide the signposts guiding the explorer. Throughout this book, I use tombstone messages, historical and linguistic, to frame the cultural history of an ethnic group that by now has become fully acculturated. Yet, its life is convincingly documented not only in archives and the ethnic press but also in tombstones and cemeteries.

Figure 1. Contours of Czech Texas mapped out by the presence of cemeteries[2]

The Story of Acculturation

The story of migration and acculturation, as it evolves throughout the book, has never been told before in its entirety, spanning the full period of acculturation and connecting both continents. Most of the primary sources used in the research have not been published before or translated into English. The search led me to public archives as well as private collections in the homes of immigrant descendants. I studied primary documents as well as cultural and sociological accounts of American Czech settlements. I analyzed statistics, government census data, and maps of Texas Czech as well as homeland Moravian settlements. I read letters, notes, and newspapers of the first immigrants and their descendants, and I also read and photographed their epitaphs. By collecting ethnographic data of all sorts and gaining access to individuals who helped to preserve the memory of their ancestors, I began to see Texas through the Czech immigrant's eyes. While taking photographs at the Wesley cemetery, I met Pastor Maly, a fourth-generation Czech who loved to converse with me in the Czech he remembered from childhood. On one visit he also unlocked the church and told me the story of its frescoes, pastors, and pioneer believers. At the Fayetteville café, I spoke to old Mrs. Haluška about her grandparents immigrating from Moravia, and about her children living in Houston. A real treat was drinking beer with Mr. Bača, a descendant of the Bača clan that spawned several Czech music bands; today his band plays Texas Czech polkas at the tavern where his grandmother once sold ice cream and where we had chatted.

This book presents a case study in the acculturation of a neglected ethnic group of peasants from Bohemia and Moravia, and thus attempts to fill gaps in the research on the nineteenth-century immigration period, East European immigration to the U.S., and the immigration of peasants. It studies the historical sources of the emigration in the Czech Lands and traces the immigrants' acculturation over a period of four generations. Trained as a linguist, I began to research the acculturation of my people at first solely through the prism of language as the key to ethnicity. Czech, the language of the immigrants' homeland, was also used for self-identification in emigration, and English became the language in which the immigrants eventually established their new identity after World War II. In between the periods of emigration and World War II, the community consciously cultivated its language, and I seek to explain specifically how this happened. But the book eventually took on a life of its own and turned

into an interdisciplinary study of acculturation discussed through historical and cultural as well as linguistic perspectives. Despite the recent explosion in case studies of ethnicity maintenance and immigrant experience in America, East Europeans remain understudied. The history of Germans in Texas, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania, the experience of Jews in the U.S., and urban settlements of various ethnic groups throughout the country, including Slovaks and Poles, have been analyzed and documented, but little has been published about those who came from the rural country in the very heart of Europe prior to the twentieth-century migrations. Moravians are typically associated with the Moravian Brethren of Bethlehem in Pennsylvania who arrived around the middle of the eighteenth century, rather than with the vigorous wave of immigration that occurred a century later.[3]

Throughout this book I juxtapose the linguistic and material data of tombstones with the life of the community that produced them and that is intriguingly recorded in its press. Analysis of Texas Czech newspapers reveals a wealth of ethnographic materials; it is a window into the life of the community. Its content and language fit into the overall chronological structure of the community, as gleaned from the Texas Czech graveyard. Its pre-World War I years are marked by the stability of a self-centered community that wrote for and about itself and memorialized its past. Over the years, it developed alongside the American majority into a community with a new Texas Czech identity. The interwar years of both the press and the graveyard are marked by negotiation of this new identity. Czech speakers switched between Czech and English in their stone writing, editorials were increasingly aligned with the American reality, and readers' letters responded to American and Texan developments; but they began to lose track of the situation of European Czechs. Finally, in the post-World War II years the Czech community dissipated.

All the first-rate studies from which I learned about Czech Texas were written by Texas insiders who grew up in Texas as members of the Czech community and descendants of pioneer immigrants. The insiders sought answers to their questions of community life and cultural maintenance primarily in Texas itself. For answers to my questions I had to turn to the history of the Czech Lands and find reasons for the change in the economic, political, and cultural climate of the second half of the nineteenth century. The insiders based descriptions of the Texas Czech community in part on their own experience and narrated or analyzed what they had witnessed. My main access to the

Texas Czech community were its survivors and primary sources, among them Louis Polansky, a generous man of noble heart, writer and collector of Czech memorabilia, living and cultivating Texas Czech history. He passed away a few months after I submitted the manuscript to the publisher. I am indebted to all the authors of Texas Czech studies. Kevin Hannan provided me with primary witness accounts as well as carefully researched linguistic data; Dr. Josef Šimíček shared with me his meticulous research of emigration from his native Moravian region; and Mr. Janak saved me many hours of traveling throughout the Texas country in search of tombstone inscription data through his statistical analysis of inscriptions indicating immigrants' places of origin. The books of professors Machann, Mendl, and Skrabanek contained critical background data on the Texas Czech community presented from the sociological perspective. Other scholars led me to sources and indicated directions through research relevant to Texas Germans, namely Terry Jordan, Frederick Luebke, and Glenn Gilbert. I have also gained intimate insights and hours of pleasure from the unpublished stories of Mr. Louis Polansky. My colleagues Elinor and Marijan Despalatović from Connecticut College convinced me that I was actually writing a cultural history of a community that may be of more use and interest to scholars than a linguistic analysis of stages in language death would be. I benefitted immensely from hours of discussion with them and owe them gratitude for the interest with which they read draft after draft of my work. My deep appreciation goes to Kevin Hannan for his generous commentaries on my drafts and countless hints on where to search. My thanks go to George Fowler, not only for his work on my manuscript but also for his promotion of Slavic studies, to Slavica's outside reviewers for their fresh perspective on my work, and to Slavica's editor Vicki Polansky for her attention to detail and careful as well as considerate editing of my manuscript. I also learned from the questions and suggestions (as well as inserted and deleted English articles) of my colleagues at Connecticut College, Historický ústav and Etnologický ústav ČAV in Prague, archives in the Czech Republic, and scholars with whom I have corresponded over the years.

I once could have been a Texas immigrant, too, but gave up and turned back, just like Kateřina, one of the heroes of my book, having spent no more than one year of my life in Texas. Texas has thus remained an alien land to me, but one that attracts me and that I gladly visit whenever the thermometer drops below eighty. I have written the

book as an observer fascinated by questions that insiders might find offensive and useless; for them the Texas Czech community was a given: one does not question the existence of his or her homeland. But I did question the facts on Czech Texas. I found bewildering that the pioneers settled there. But like them, I, too, came directly from the old country. I was born and grew up in Prague, but my parents came from Moravia and my grandparents from Vienna. While growing up I was deciphering what my grandma said in German or broken Czech. Although several members of my extended family emigrated to North America for political and religious reasons, I am the only one who has ever lived in Texas, considered the most exotic, romantic, and wild place on earth by Czechs.

From the beginning, both the Texas Czech graveyard and the press stirred my interest immensely. I felt among my own people at the cemeteries; they were gentle places of rest in a strange foreign land. I was touched by the emotion the tombstone inscriptions contained, and laughed over their amusing spelling errors, at the same time. When I first read through the pages of the Texas Czech newspaper *Svoboda* (Liberty, Freedom), I sensed I had found a gold mine. It was rich with information about the settlements, and its thousands of pages, written at weekly intervals from 1885 until the 1960s, contained the story of the acculturation of Czechs in Texas. In studying both sources I acquired a tremendous respect for the immigrants. This book is written in their honor.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From the Czech Lands to Texas

From the middle of the nineteenth century to World War I, several thousand peasants from the borderlands of Moravia and Slovakia, and peripheral regions of eastern Bohemia and northeastern Moravia emigrated to Texas. They were preceded by pioneer adventurers who came to Texas from Bohemia. The search for answers to the basic questions, such as who the immigrants were and why they left for Texas, uncovers various leads and diverse factors but also reveals a shared climate conducive to emigration. Signs in Texas tombstones lead back to the homeland; analysis of the economic situation of homeland villages (listed on tombstones) brings out the reasons why so many left them. Emigrant letters, memoirs, and emigration petitions illustrate the history of Czech emigration and portray Texas at the time of the Czech pioneers' arrival. But why did the Šimíčeks, Gajdas, and

Nováks leave at a time when conditions in the Habsburg empire had begun to improve? They had finally been released from the duties imposed by forced labor (*corvée*) and could move around; the National Revival gave them hope of ending the domination of the powerful German minority and building a new nation at home.

Stories of the first pioneers indicate that they followed personal ideals formed against the backdrop of literary novels about America and the independence of the Texas Republic. They all wrote home how warm and pleasant was the Texas climate, and how abundant the land in game and fertile fields. The news spread among peasants, laborers, and weavers who followed the leaders in the 1850s and after the Civil War from Moravia, where economic prospects for the poor were hopeless. They desired to get out of Austria to escape mounting threats of accumulated debts, eviction, and job loss, and wanted to provide for their children. They went where the land was cheap and the weather good, and happened to end up in Texas. They read about Texas in a German paper or somehow got the news of the free land policy of the Texas Republic. The idea that they could own hundreds of acres must have sounded like a fairy tale to peasants who depended on a couple of acres or were landless laborers. Ultimately, they were attracted by letters sent by those who went ahead, whose tales of success convinced them that the dream of America could come true.

The catalysts for their journey were both the external forces of historical conflicts and economic shifts then rocking the European continent as a whole and factors unique to the regions from which the pioneers came. Unemployment, hunger, land depletion, and fear of the future inspired the masses to seek solutions outside their homeland. The immigrants arrived at a time when Texas sought to attract immigrants who would colonize the unbroken prairies and take over abandoned plantations, luring them with promises of abundant land and prosperity. They came at the moment when defeat in the Civil War and the abolition of slavery had devastated the Texas plantation economy; Texas needed cheap labor and sought it assertively at a time when Bohemia and Moravia were suffering the consequences of defeat in the Austro-Prussian War and the decline of the weaving industry. The immigrants replaced black slaves on land bought from plantation owners and thus ushered in three decades of economic growth. Given major cultural differences between the Central Europe of the post-1848 revolutionary period and the crumbling Texas plantation, it is not surprising that the immigrants did not readily identify with America.

They did replace their national costume for Texan cowboy boots, but slowly and hesitantly.

Two developments in Czech domestic history—serfdom modified into *robota* (forced labor, *corvée*) and the National Revival—had a particularly important impact on the migration of Czechs and their acculturation on the American continent. Serfdom had persisted throughout most of the eighteenth century, when it was finally turned into *robota* by decree of Joseph II.[4] *Robota* allowed for some personal freedom yet still tied peasants to the land and required labor on feudal estates that, although theoretically governed by regulations, was in practice often unrestrained, exploitative, and restrictive of population mobility.[5] Forced labor could mean work in the forest, normatively measured by the amount of wood that the peasant had to cut and haul to the stream (a penalty was imposed when this norm was not accomplished) or labor in the fields throughout the year, in particular during harvest, with or without use of the peasant's domestic animals.[6] When peasants were finally released from forced labor between 1848 and the early 1850s, they found themselves empty-handed and incapacitated to move on. In addition to paying taxes and contributing over ten percent of their income to the church, until 1886 they were required to make annual payments compensating former masters for the loss of their labor. Although low and expandable over ten or more years, the payments brought many to debt when incurred in years marked by weather disasters that caused unpredictable agricultural yields.[7] The bond of debt proved even more strangling than that of forced labor. To many, emigration was not a choice but a necessity. By the time they reached the point of decision to go to America, many were being threatened with imprisonment, eviction from their homes and the estates on which they were employed, and a complete dearth of prospects for the future.

The impressions of those who reached Texas first were mixed. The immigrants were taken aback by the wild climate and landscape of Texas, the dangers of the prairie, and the labor required to turn the land into useful fields. But they had no means of returning to their homeland. They realized that they could gain only by increasing their own numbers. The immigrants believed that, together, they could reverse the natural obstacles of the inhospitable Texan environment as long as they had land and could depend on their working hands. Although some advised their relatives to stay home, this message often came too late, arriving when the recipients were already too far along

in their preparations for departure (typically had sold their property to obtain the money needed to prove their solvency, as mandated by Austrian authorities) and could not have turned back. Communication between Texas and the homeland was extremely slow and unreliable. Steamships did not start crossing the Atlantic regularly until the late 1850s, when they became financially accessible to travelers. The lines of communication were also disrupted by wars on both continents, the Civil War in America and the wars fought and lost by the Habsburgs in the 1860s.

The second, and somewhat unique, feature marking Czech immigration was the fact that just prior to emigrating the population experienced a National Revival. Although it began as a desperate move by a few intellectuals that did not seem likely to succeed, by the 1860s and 1870s it had turned into a truly national movement that was heavily linguocentric but that also brought forth claims of national identity and demands for self-governance. Since the 1850s, an increasing number of schools beyond the elementary grades used the Czech language in teaching throughout Bohemia and Moravia.[8] Compulsory schooling through the medium of the mother language produced a literate population and established the foundation for the explosion of Czech journalism in 1848–49.[9] The Czech language was spread effectively through the channel of preaching, thanks to its well-founded tradition. Language became a means of building national life, and knowing and using Czech came to serve as a measure of one's love for the motherland. Dictionaries and grammar books were published, theaters performed plays in Czech, Czech newspapers were disseminated to the reading public, and choral, reading, and theatrical groups were established.[10]

The Revival affected both Czechs and Moravians, but while the Czechs had a distinct historical center of Czech cultural life in the city of Prague, Moravians had no comparable center to foster the National Revival.[11] In addition, Moravia's emerging bourgeoisie was mainly German, its church conservatively supported the administrative subordination of Moravia to the dynasty rather than to the historical Czech Lands, and the press was in German hands.[12] But national life continued to gain prominence in Moravia through the medium of the Czech language, as manifested by its administrative use and the establishment of Czech schools, organizations, and journals.[13] In 1861 Czech became an official administrative language in Prague.[14] In the same year, Občanská beseda, a Czech patriotic society, was founded in

many Czech and Moravian towns, including Frenštát pod Radhoštěm, one of the centers of Moravian emigration. In 1863 a new town council was elected in Frenštát, and the new mayor introduced the Czech language to the offices of the Town Hall.[15] Czech centers eventually emerged throughout northeastern Moravia. In 1862, Rožnov pod Radhoštěm founded its own Občanská beseda, opened a special Czech class (as supervised by František Palacký himself) that taught Czech history and geography, and founded a choral society. Ten years later, Rožnov had its own public library. The journal *Moravan* (The Moravian) appeared in Olomouc in 1862; it addressed tasks of the Czech people in Moravia and promoted Czech reading clubs and various organizations.[16] By the late 1860s, when the influx of immigrants from Bohemia and Moravia to Texas was steady and strong, the campaign for the unity of the Czech nation and the Czech literary language spread through the press and public speeches of writers and politicians traveling throughout the countryside in order to enlighten the general population. Despite the slow start of the National Revival in Moravia, and its hesitant penetration to regions of emigration, the local population acknowledged the prestige of Prague and of its literary language.[17] The emigrants were capable of transferring the vigor with which they built their national life in the homeland to Texas, where they displayed equally nationalistic and slavophile attitudes. This national awareness shielded immigrants from the outer world of America for decades and secured community maintenance.

European Emigration

The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed unprecedented economic changes throughout Europe that were ushered in by the first industrial revolution, made possible by the introduction of the steam engine. Factories began to dot the landscape, agricultural productivity increased, and rapid urbanization caused faster population growth in the city than in the countryside. In the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Europe was in motion, building colonial empires, seeking to establish national states, urbanizing its population, modernizing the countryside and sending peasants to factories. One technological invention followed another, each promising a longer, healthier, and more comfortable life. Steam-powered trains and ships interconnected cities, coasts, and continents; railroad networks redefined the countryside; and the power loom replaced handloom weaving. But peasants gained little benefit from industrialization and

modernization, and continued to suffer from the consequences of crop failures and potato famine. Factories centralized production and eliminated the jobs of rural craftsmen, and American and Russian wheat (as it arrived through newly constructed railroads) depressed grain prices in Europe by saturating the market.[18]

Except for emigrants from Ireland and Germany, mass emigration from Europe did not begin until the 1850s, and not until after the Civil War did it reach flood-tide proportions.[19] Between 1850 and 1860, 2.6 million arrived in the United States: Germany and Ireland led the way with a million immigrants each, and Britain and Scandinavia followed the pattern; the same number of immigrants came to America in the 1870s, twice as many came in the 1880s (with two-thirds emigrating from Western Europe), and 20 million immigrants arrived in the period 1890–1920. In the early years of the new century, the majority of immigrants came from Austria-Hungary and Italy, 1.6 million from Russia and the rest from Asia, Germany, Britain, and Scandinavia.[20] The Czechs joined these millions hoping to improve their life conditions.[21]

Economic Situation in the Czech Lands

In terms of cultural and economic advancement, the Czech Lands resembled England or Germany more than any other East European region. In the mid-nineteenth century, progress and the outcomes of the industrial revolution in the Habsburg monarchy corresponded to worldwide cyclical shifts of growth and depression. The Czech Lands, split into Bohemia, Moravia (its northern provinces), and part of Silesia (situated on the periphery of northeastern Moravia since the early 1840s), followed Western Europe very closely in economic development and population growth, unlike eastern parts of the monarchy.[22] The industrial revolution of Western Europe slowly crept into a monarchy exhausted by costly wars and entangled ethnic conflicts. The Habsburgs did not enjoy the benefits of overseas colonial empires, and lacked the capital investment for broad-scale modernization and industrialization; throughout the empire economic development was unbalanced. Many regions were overpopulated as far back as the 1820s due to economic and demographic factors (declining mortality, higher birth rates); demand for agricultural workers decreased, and industry was developing too slowly to keep pace with job demand. In 1850 in the Czech Lands, eighty percent of the population still lived in

villages with less than 2,000 inhabitants and only four percent in towns with more than 10,000.[23]

During the first half of the nineteenth century the Czech Lands' textile-producing regions were among those with the highest population density, saturated with domestic production even in the smallest and poorest villages and settlements.[24] The population lived from meager agricultural income and domestic industry, forced to combine several forms of employment to sustain livelihood because the stony, shallow, and unproductive land could not feed them.[25] They grew potatoes, rye, cabbage, grass for cattle-feed, and flax, one of the few plants that thrived in the cold clay soil and one of the agricultural products that economically defined the northern regions of Bohemia and Moravia.[26] They also raised sheep for wool. Many worked seasonally in the landowners' fields and archbishop's forests, living in little overcrowded cottages with ten or more persons in each, in which the spinning wheel dominated the entire space.[27] The first major impetus to modernization and the mechanization of manufacturing came in the 1830s and lasted until 1847, and was manifested first and most actively in the production of textiles.[28] Economic restructuring involved the shift from domestic to factory production of linen and wool, the establishment of manufactures, and eventually also a shift away from home-cultivated flax and wool to imported cotton. The textile industry of economically and climatically inhospitable areas drew masses to employment in local factories and manufactures precisely because it offered jobs outside of agriculture. By the middle of the nineteenth century, towns accessible from agricultural villages were industrialized; new factory jobs were sought by landless laborers and peasants who found themselves increasingly unable to support their families by farming and domestic weaving. But mechanized production of linen and wool forced domestic weavers into unfair competition with cheaper and better factory-produced fabrics. They could barely buy new material with the money they made from endless work involving entire families; they suffered most from the industrial revolution as they tried to retain their livelihood using obsolete techniques.

As early as the 1850s, factory jobs proved insufficient in number and unstable, but local weavers, many of whom were landless, depended on them. In the years of poor harvests and particularly low demand for linen, they starved.[29] The importation of cotton into the Monarchy in the 1860s destroyed the traditional linen and wool production that represented the peasants' cash crops.[30] There existed no

other industry in eastern Bohemia and northeastern Moravia that could employ weavers.[31] The crisis of domestic textile production was accompanied by a sharp decrease in sheep cultivation in the 1850s that led to its elimination over the next four decades throughout Moravia, except for in the Wallachian region.[32] Within a few years, the weavers were impoverished.[33] When they boarded the trains for the port of Bremen, they left their weaving looms behind. They were not attracted to the centers of textile industry in Pennsylvania and New England but to the expanses of Texas.

While northern Bohemia was always among the most advanced and industrial regions of the Czech Lands, its eastern section, Wallachia (located to the southwest of Lachia in the foothills of the Carpathians), and Lachia (the northeast corner of Moravia, adjoining Silesia and bordering on Poland), mountainous regions distant from major urban centers, were traditionally among the poorest and most backward areas of the Czech Lands.[34] The 1830s and 1840s were devastating here; one infertile season followed another, and the region suffered from severe storms and flood. Potatoes, which fed the majority of the population, were infected by potato blight that caused periodic famine; fields yielded poor grain crops. As a result, hundreds starved to death or fell victim to cholera and typhus epidemics.[35] The first groups emigrated in the early 1850s from the northeast Bohemian region around Lanškroun. This initial trickling of pioneers was followed by a strong and lasting emigration wave from adjacent northeast Moravia.

Emigration from the Czech Lands

Czech and Moravian migration to Texas represented one strand of a strong and long exodus from the center of Europe prior to modern times (when Czechoslovakia suffered the loss of several millions due to fascist occupation, communist take-over, and Soviet invasion). The very first emigration of Czechs was that of the Protestant nobility after the Thirty Years War. The exodus continued into the eighteenth century with the Moravian Brethren who ended up seeking freedom to practice their faith in Georgia, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, as did many other religious orders and sects.[36] From the 1850s on, the exodus was fueled also by political and economic factors. Entire families left in groups and invited relatives to join them later. Unlike the modern emigrations that are still remembered, publicized, and contextualized in the shared history of East European communist countries, the nineteenth-century emigration sank into oblivion.

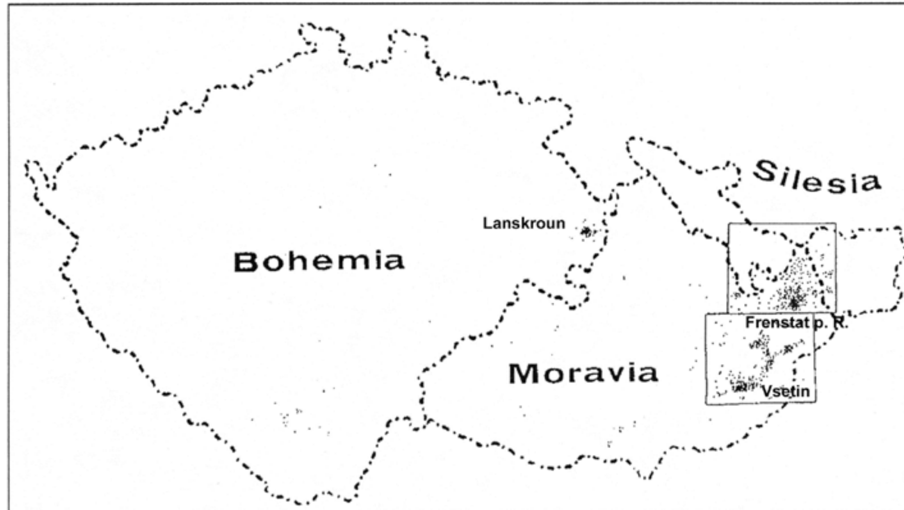

Figure 2. Distribution of villages with significant emigration to Texas[37]

Czechs and Moravians began to leave en masse when the opportunity first struck, i.e., in the early 1850s. They could leave no earlier as emigration was illegal until 1848, when the 1832 decree legalizing emigration was enforced;[38] Bohemia and Moravia were landlocked until the railroad network connecting them to northern seaports was developed;[39] and peasants were tied to the land through *robota* until 1848 (and even later in remote regions). Almost as many left the country within the first decade of the 1850s (54,000) as during the half-century preceding the abolition of serfdom in 1781 (60,000).[40] During the earliest years of emigration few rural regions in America were open for land seekers, and Texas, Wisconsin, and Iowa were the first destinations of Czechs.[41] They established their first colonies in Racine, Cleveland, Cedar Rapids, and small settlements in Texas.[42] From 1850 on, emigration grew with every decade until World War I. Between 1850 and 1869, 58,000 (with emigrants from Bohemia forming a seventy-five percent majority) departed from the Czech Lands for America, where they dispersed to Baltimore, New York, New Orleans, St. Louis, Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, and the states of Texas, Nebraska, Iowa,[43] Kansas, the Dakotas, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.[44] They traveled primarily by boat because railroad networks were not yet developed throughout the country. The journey was long and exhaust-

ing. Those who decided on the Midwest landed in New York or Baltimore; those who went to the south debarked in New Orleans and Galveston. By 1890, 170,000 Czech immigrants had arrived in America from Bohemia and Moravia, almost half of the total Czech immigration into the States from 1850 to 1950, but the number could also have been twice as high since the emigration of many went unregistered as they had not applied for a travel or emigration permit.[45] Emigration peaked between 1880 and 1910, when the population loss was half a million; half of the migrants left for various destinations within the Habsburg monarchy, primarily Vienna, and the other half went abroad, mainly to America.[46]

In 1848, emigration became legal for all who had paid off their debts, completed military service or were exempt from it, and were granted an official permit, which was required until 1867. But many left the Czech Lands with a travel passport or permit (valid for a period of one to three years) in order to retain their citizenship and thus the right of domicile and the financial social support to which they could resort in the event that emigration did not work out.[47] They sold all their property to obtain sufficient funds for travel.[48] Among the emigrants there were also farmers who were prospering at home but wanted to use their property to do even better in America. The police closely followed returning or visiting emigrants and their mail because it feared the spread of liberal ideas about American democracy. When the 1867 Constitution was adopted, the freedom to emigrate was limited only by military duty, and after 1868, those who were not required to serve in the military did not even have to be released from Austrian citizenship.[49]

Czech Peasants in Texas

Central Europeans arrived on the near-frontier of American civilization, a region roamed by bison and defined by conflicts between white settlers and Native Americans. Soon they became a major determinant in the construction of a regional American identity. Literate and skilled, these peasants and laborers arrived from villages that had their own chronicle scribes and eloquent priests. They read newspapers and engraved messages for future generations in well maintained cemeteries. Once in Texas they actively corresponded with homeland relatives whom they informed about Texas and America.

In both eastern Bohemia and northeastern Moravia, villages were nestled among valleys and foothills, typically within walking distance

of one another, with fields attached to farms, surrounded by forests and lakes. People lived in a picturesque environment but did not see its beauty until they had left it forever. The countryside was defined by churches and cemeteries, wayside crosses, prayer stations, and saints' statues. The regions were colonized between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, with Germans participating substantially in the settlement. The nearby towns were shaped around squares lined with merchant houses and dominated by a town hall and church. The immigrants arrived from a world that was settled and civilized; but their mobility and social life was typically confined to their village and the closest town. When they emigrated, they crossed, for the first time, geographical and social boundaries separating their confined villages from the outer world, which they expected to be similar to theirs. But it was not.

Although America and, specifically, Texas became hot topics in the Czech press as ideals of freedom, democracy, and self-governance as early as the 1850s, the real America was unknown, and memoirs and letters reveal meager knowledge about emigration destinations during the pioneer years. Although the cotton plantations of the South seemed at first an unlikely destination for the European immigrant, he stayed and transformed them into a farmland he could manage. He farmed in a drastically different Texas environment for a period of an entire century (from the antebellum to the post-World War II period) and made a significant imprint on the Texas agricultural economy. Of all states with substantial Czech population, Texas had not only the largest majority of Czechs involved in farming but also outranked all states in the total number of Czech-Americans after World War II. Together with Anglo-Americans, African-Americans, and Germans, Czechs significantly contributed to the ethnic composition of Texas for the next century.[50]

The migration of Czechs and Moravians to Texas (and also to Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas) was a typical farm family migration similar to that of the German peasants who were already settled there when the Czechs arrived (and very different from labor migrations of Slovaks, Poles, or Greeks to American cities since the 1880s). Why did Wallachians and Lachians choose Texas over other states? Perhaps the fact that they lived in partial isolation from centrally located and more advanced regions at home contributed to their dependence on reports of trusted leaders and family members who preceded them to Texas. Easy access to cheap land and a warm

climate that contrasted with harsh winters and cold rainy summers at home played in as well. A unique feature of Czech immigration to Texas was that so many persons from a few interconnected regions in the homeland settled in one small area of Texas, where immigrants from other regions of the Czech Lands represented a rare exception. Instead of dispersing across the prairies they stayed in the central region on the best blackland in all of Texas. Until the end of World War II, they inhabited the triangle between Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, where they lived for four generations as a distinct community in settlements centered around churches.

In many respects, Czechs in Texas resembled the Germans there, and a description of one community could easily be applied to the other as well.[51] Both Czechs and Germans were seen as excellent frugal farmers, farming intensively to get the most out of small land parcels that they valued as permanent property; both displayed greater productivity and locational stability than Anglo-American farmers. Both document an unusually long domestic language and culture maintenance in the Texas emigration.[52] But the ethnic cohesion of the Czechs is even tighter than that of the Germans because the former came as a homogeneous group of primarily Catholic peasants from regions sharing historical, geographic, and economic background, and speaking closely related dialects.[53] The community grew out of interrelated families from a few Moravian villages, unlike communities in Illinois, the Midwest, or the Northeast, made up of immigrants from scattered parts of Bohemia and Moravia, many of them not just Catholics and Protestants but also freethinkers, laborers as well as peasants; the community displayed a rare unity of the Czech population.[54] It represents an ideal microcosm for the study of maintenance of an immigrant farming community.[55]