

Czech Pioneers in the American Northwest

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Czech settlements in America have generally been associated with big cities, such as Milwaukee, St. Louis, New York, Chicago and Cleveland, as well as the rural Midwest. Nevertheless, individual immigrants from Czech lands have appeared in other areas of the United States, although relatively little is known about them and even less written.

The focus of this essay is the American Northwest. The news that gold had been found in California led to the famous “rush” of gold seekers to the southern part of the Pacific West. The Northern Pacific areas, however, posed no such attraction, at least not initially. The rights in the northwestern region, known, in 1818, as the Oregon Territory, were shared by the US and the Britain. The Oregon Treaty, in 1884, divided the Territory that included Oregon, Washington, Idaho and part of Canada at the 49th parallel, a continuation of the boundary between Canada and the US. The present paper therefore encompasses the mentioned States plus Alaska, Montana and Wyoming, the latter constituting the eastern end of the historic Oregon Country at the Continental Divide.

Oregon

The first Czechs settled in the state of Oregon in 1852, when Louis Fleischner (1826-1896),¹ accompanied by his younger brother Jacob (1832-1910), moved there. Two years later, Joseph Francl (1824-1875) of Svojsice, Bohemia, travelled through Oregon on his trip to California, in search for gold.² In 1856, John J. Philipi (1856-1928) came to America, locating temporarily in Portland, OR; his family eventually settled in Lewiston, ID. Herman Bories (1820-1901) and his wife Rosa (nee Freiman) (1825-1911), both from Bohemia, resided in Portland, OR since 1861, where their son Frederick was born, two years later. According to 1880 census he was a teacher. He also served as rabbi and, as such, he held rabbinical post in Portland. Josef Schiedler (b. 1840), a native of Bohemia, and his family originally immigrated to Milwaukee, WI, but in 1874 moved to Marion, OR, where their son Adolph was born in June the following year. He and his wife Katherine Saures had nine children, six of whom were born in Oregon.

By 1876, Theresia (Hiederer) Kloetsch (1839-1894), of Bohemia, resided with her husband Jacob Kloetsch and their children in Marion, Oregon, because in December of that year their son John H. Kloetsch was born there, in a place called Sublimity. The family had nine children, of whom seven were born at St Anna, Calumet, where they originally resided. In 1877, Wenceslaus Kahut (1849-1943), from Strakonice, Bohemia was married in Gervais, OR. In 1879, Joseph Bouška (1856-1934), of Kladno, Bohemia journeyed to Oregon City, Oregon and operated for the Portland flour milling company for five years. He later moved to Bridgeport, WA.

Of all these people, Louis Fleischner (1827-1896), a native of Lhotka, Bohemia, who became a leading merchant of Portland, distinguished himself most. He immigrated to America in 1842, having first resided in Philadelphia, where he was employed by a horse and cattle dealer for five years. From there he went to Drakeville, David County, Iowa, where he ran a store. In 1852, heeding the call of the West, he crossed the plains with an ox team, heading for Oregon. The land immigrants of this year experienced unusual hardships. Disease killed all of their cattle, while many of the immigrants perished from the cholera. After weary months of suffering Fleischner arrived in Albany, Oregon, where he embarked in the mercantile business, and for the following seven years did a very successful business. In 1859 he sold out and for one year conducted a store at the Oro Fino mines. In the fall of that year he took a stock of goods to Lewiston, Idaho, arriving on the first steamboat landing there. He remained there until 1863, when he came to Portland, where he eventually established the firm of L. Fleischner & Co. which was very successful. In 1869 he sold out and soon thereafter, under the same firm name, embarked in the wholesale dry goods business. The firm ranked among the first in the State and outside of San Francisco unexcelled on the coast. He was associated with his brother Jacob, and when they both retired, Jacob's two sons, Isaac Newton and Marcus took over, since Lewis was unmarried.

In addition to his eminently successful business career, Louis Fleischner was very active in Portland's political and civic affairs. In 1870 his personal popularity and the confidence he inspired among the people led to his nomination and election to the post of State Treasurer, which he held for five years. His life-long love for a childhood sweetheart, which resolved in her marriage to another man and her premature death due to lack of adequate medical facilities, inspired him to erect a hospital in his native village in Bohemia. He was also president of the First Hebrew Benevolent Association of Portland and one of the most active members of Congregation Beth Israel. He also built the first elaborate synagogue in Oregon.³

Another individual of note was Joseph Polivka (b. 1850), a Bohemian native, who sailed for America in the spring of 1880, landing at New York. From where, after three months, he came to Portland. Since 1883, he had engaged in business dealing in and importing fine woolens, under the name of Joseph Polivka & Co. He built up a good business, being then one of the leading tailors of the northwest, making large importations of fine woolens, while the work of the tailoring department was unsurpassed. He had indeed the only exclusive tailoring establishment of the city and catered only to the highest class trade. He also made extensive investments in stocks in many private business concerns and corporations and was recognized as a man of sound judgment, keen discrimination and unfaltering enterprise. Prominent in Masonic circles, Polivka had attained the thirty-second degree of the Scottish Rite and was a member of the Mystic Shrine since first crossing the sands of the desert in February, 1899.⁴

Three towns in Oregon have had substantial presence of Czech immigrants, namely: Scio, Scappoose, and Malin.⁵ Scio is one of the oldest towns in Oregon, with a mild climate, rich farm soil, and a gentle landscape, reminding one of Bohemia. A group of Czechs, led by Joe Young Jr. from Kansas, arrived there in 1898, searching for suitable land to start a Czech community, just at the time when large tracts of farmland became available for sale.



Scappoose features Havlik Road, named after the first Czech settler in this town, John Havlik, who purchased farmland there in 1905. He became a successful farmer and store owner, and the part of town, where he lived, used to be called Havliksville. The third town, Malin, located on land that was once covered by Tule Lake, was founded and named by members of the Czech Colonization Club in 1910. It got its name from Louis A. Kalina (1880-1967), a merchant, who brought his family to Oregon, being one of the Czech Club, with headquarters in Omaha, NE. Kalina was mayor of Malin for 27 of the town's first 28 years of existence.⁶

Washington

The first Czech to come to the State of Washington was Francis Xavier Richter (1837-1910), a native of Frýdlant, Bohemia, who, in 1862, moved to Lewiston, WA from Texas and Arizona, where he first immigrated.⁷ In the spring of 1875, Joseph (1824-1875) walked from Placerville, CA to Portland, Oregon. That's 60 miles of walking. He then turned right at the Columbia River and walked up to the Blue Mountains in the State of Washington, where his son lived.⁸

In 1875, Anton Hylák (1837-1907) from Bohemia brought his family to Lewis Co., WA and settled near the city of Chehalis. He was the owner of a water power saw and grist mill and became extensive producer of lumber and flour. He also raised Hereford cattle and Norman Percheron horses. The family originally immigrated to Iowa around 1867.⁹

In 1876, John Jelínek (b. 1888), from Tábor, Bohemia, moved from Wisconsin to Seattle, WA, via the Union Pacific Railway and steamer; he was brought to the US by his parents in 1863. Finding little employment on the Sound, he went on foot to Pierce City, Idaho, a distance of over five hundred miles, where he worked in the placer mines. Later, he was located on the Clearwater, after which we find him employed at Texas Ferry on the Snake. From there, he went to the Yakima River, WA and did timber work for the Northern Pacific. After this, he worked at various places along the Northern Pacific, and did bridgework until 1882, the year in which he selected a homestead and timber culture, in Douglas County,

WA. After staking this claim, he worked a year more on the Northern Pacific, then came to his land and started improving it.¹⁰

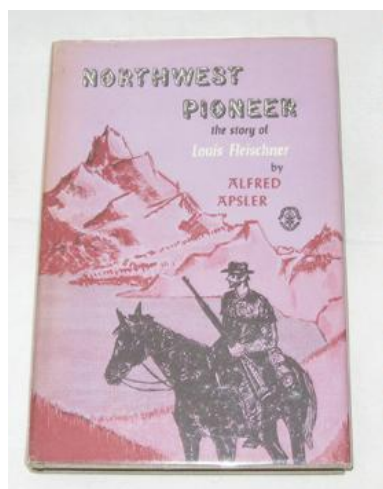


The most prominent Czech immigrant in Washington State was Jacob Furth (1840-1914), who arrived there with his family from California in 1882. A native of Švihov, Bohemia, Jacob Furth played a pivotal role in the development of Seattle's public transportation and electric power infrastructure, and he was also the founder of Seattle National Bank. As the agent for the utilities firm Stone and Furth, he consolidated the city's random independent streetcar lines into Seattle Electric. He was a member of Seattle's first synagogue, Ohaveth Sholum, and Temple de Hirsch. He was not only a key developer but a public spirited one: During the crisis of the Great Fire of 1889 and at other times Furth put the city before his own business interests. One of Furth's first business ventures in Seattle was to rescue from bankruptcy the privately owned firm that operated the Spring Hill water system, which supplied water to city hoses, spigots, and fire hydrants. Furth recruited his banking colleague Bailey Gatzert, and John Leary, founder of the Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*, to bail out Spring Hill. They built a pumping station on Lake Washington and made

the system viable. Initially, and in part, rescuing Spring Hill was a matter of public service, but Furth's sound financial sense soon turned it into a profitable venture.¹¹

In 1884, Joseph Bouška (1856-1934), of Bohemia came to Cheney, WA from Portland, OR, having originally immigrated to Wisconsin in 1866. After that he came to Cheney and was engaged with ex-Governor George E. Cole as head miller of the Cheney flour mill. Two years later, we find him in Pine City, Washington, as lessee of the mill owned by A. J. Smith, which he operated for one year. He handled other mills in the vicinity and later came to Sprague in the same business. In 1888, he was appointed head miller and sawyer at the Nespelim Indian sub-agency and had charge for three and one half years. He then went to Ritzville and took an interest in the milling plant, owned by J. G. Stevens, Adams Company Bank, and W. E. Blackmer, where he remained for one and a half years. Selling out, he came to Bridgeport, WA and operated a flour mill there for seven years. In 1901, he resigned his position and moved to his ranch near Port Columbia. Later, he sold this property and removed to Bridgeport where he opened a general merchandise establishment, also handling furniture. He became one of the leading men in the town of Bridgeport.¹²

Idaho



As for the State of Idaho, the mentioned Louis Fleischner (1829-1890) from Podlesí (Vogelsang), Bohemia, lived in Lewiston, ID, from 1859 till 1863, where he arrived on the first steamboat landing in that place. He then removed to Portland, OR. In 1876, John Jelinek came here on foot from Seattle, WA. In 1885, John J. Philipi (1856-1928), a native of Prague, operated a first class tailor shop in Lewiston, ID, having moved there from Portland. This Lewiston pioneer served conspicuously through the Nez Perce Indian War. He enlisted in the cavalry of the US Army, and shortly afterward the troop was ordered to Fort Lapwai, ID, to take part in the Indian War of 1877. Philipi was in the battle of White Bird. After his enlistment period was over, he brought his family to Lewiston where he remained until his death. With his wife, the Czech born Fannie Podany, they had four children. The large family also included Philipi's three brothers and his wife's four sisters.¹³

In 1898, Wencel W. Papesh (1877-1963), from Bohemia, came to Wardner, ID, having originally immigrated with his parents to MN in 1881. In 1906 he established a butcher shop at Kellogg and put forth every effort to build up a substantial trade. His careful management and integrity constituted the strong features of a growing success and in 1907 he was also able to establish a market at Wardner. From the beginning his business grew rapidly and assumed very substantial proportions. In 1909 he became one of the organizers of the First State Bank of Kellogg and was elected to the vice presidency, while in 1910 he was chosen president of the bank. In July of the same year the Papesh Meat Company was incorporated. He was also the president of the Wallace Meat Co. which conducted both a wholesale and retail trade and had the finest shop in northwestern Idaho. Papesh also acquired extensive real estate interests, being connected with the Cowles Papesh Investment Co., which owned the best business site in Kellogg. Papesh was one of the first city councilmen of Kellogg, filling that position when the city was incorporated.¹⁴

Montana

In 1866, Louis Gans (1840-1904), a native of Neustadtl, Bohemia, established a merchandise business in Helena, Montana, having immigrated to America in 1857 and settling first in California, then Portland and from there in Boise City. In 1867, Louis Gans formed a partnership with Henry Klein, specializing in men's clothing and furnishings. Branch stores were eventually opened in Butte and in Fort Benton. Since 1872, Gans made his headquarters in New York as buyer for the numerous stores of Gans & Klein. There he became one of the founders of the Montefiore Home and director of Mount Sinai Hospital and President of Beth-El Congregation. When he died, he left \$500,000 in gifts.¹⁵



Joseph Horský (1842-1930), a real estate dealer at Helena, Montana, was a native of Kostelec nad Orlicí, Bohemia. He immigrated with his parents to this country, settling in Johnson County, Iowa, near the city of Cedar Rapids. He attended school in Iowa and Nebraska, his parents having moved from the former state to the latter, and then was engaged in farm work. In 1862, Horský went to Colorado and engaged in quartz mining, continuing there until January 1864. At that time he returned to Omaha for his brother John and together they started for Montana, arriving in Virginia City on August 27, 1865, when he came to Helena, and from that time he had given his attention to the real estate business, having considerable property in Helena and also large ranching and stock interests. His brother John Horský (1838-1924), also from

Kostelec nad Orlicí, came to Helena in the spring of 1865, where he turned his attention to the brewing business. They built the first brewery in the city, the Helena Brewery. Joseph Horský continued successfully in the brewing business until 1891 when he sold out and retired from active life. During his residence there he had all along been more or less interested in mines and mining, having done much to develop these interests in Montana. ¹⁶

Joseph's and John's father, Joseph Horský, Sr. (1806-1900), a native of Borovnice, near Kostelec na Orlicí, apparently moved to Helena, MT already in 1863. He brought his family to Linn Co., IA in 1856. In 1859, he travelled with his sons to Pike's Peak, where gold had been found, but returned three months later to Iowa. Soon thereafter he moved with his family to a claim he had taken in Washington Co., NE. In 1863 he moved to Helena, MT where he died in January 1900; his descendants still live there. ¹⁷



Joseph Horský's great-grandson, Charles Antone Horský (March 22, 1910–August 20, 1997), whom I knew personally, served as the Advisor on National Capital affairs under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and was a partner at a major and prestigious law firm. In his role at the White House and thereafter, he helped pave the way for home rule of the District of Columbia at a time when much of the city's governance was controlled by the U.S. Congress. Horský was born in Helena, Montana to Joseph T. Horský and Margaret Bowden. His father was a state district judge in Montana. His mother was the daughter of English immigrants and died when he was 10 years old. Horský grew up in Helena, and graduated from the University of Washington where he worked in a garage parking cars. At the

suggestion of his political science professor, he applied to Harvard Law School. Horský said at the time that he didn't know where Harvard was. He was accepted and later was elected President of the *Law Review*, and graduated in 1934. The Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, then a professor at Harvard and early mentor to Horský, assigned him to clerk for Judge A. N. Hand on the 2nd circuit in New York. Horský worked with Judge Hand on various cases, including several patent cases. After a year, Judge Hand

recommended that Horsky work for Stanley Reed, the new Solicitor General. Horsky went on to serve in the Solicitor General's office from 1935-37 before moving to Covington, Burling, Rublee, Acheson & Shorb (currently Covington & Burling), a leading law firm in the District of Columbia; he rose to be a partner and worked there on and off for nearly forty years.¹⁸

In 1864, Henry Schrammeck (1852-1913), from Bohemia, came overland to Montana in pioneer days, reaching the territory, as a boy of twelve. He was brought to America when he was one year old. He became a rancher. In addition to buying and selling livestock, Schrammeck operated a threshing machine, repaired ox carts, and made ox yokes.¹⁹

Wenzel Charles Rinda (1845-1919), a native of Vienna, of Bohemian parents, came to Helena, MT in 1867. He originally resided in Dubuque IA, where his parents immigrated in 1853. He was one of the discoverers of the Jay Gould Mine and other mining properties.²⁰

In 1872, James Wenzel Prelát (1832-1899) from Bohemia came to Montana. By 1875, Jacob Ornstein (1831-1883), a native of Bohemia, and his family resided in Butte, MT, where they moved from Utah. They had six children, all born in Salt Lake City. Both Jacob and his wife died in Butte. In 1883, Adolph Heller (1846-1910) became one of the largest cattle dealers in Montana with a ranch at Prairie Dog Creek and another in nearby Goose Creek, WY.

In 1887, Anton Hasher, from Bohemia, came to Billings, MT, and six months later he removed to Marysville, MT, where he opened in 1892 a boot and shoe store. Hasher kept a complete line of stylish and reliable goods, also made shoes to order and did general repairing.²¹

In 1889, Joseph J. Pokarney (1855-1946) and his wife Mary, from Dobřív, Bohemia, moved to MT, after immigrating to US in 1881. By 1890, Anton Nedvěd (1865-1938) from Bohemia resided in Butte, Silverhew Co., MT. Joseph and František Mareš, two brothers from Žamberk, Bohemia, came to Montana; they were butchers by trade.

Wyoming

In 1854, the earlier mentioned Joseph Francel (1824-1875), of Bohemia, travelled through WY, stopping at Fort Laramie, on his way to CA. In 1868, Mary Roth (1844-1902), of Bohemia, married Edwin Stephen Whittier in Benton, WY, who, during 1880 Census, resided in Evanston, Uinta, WY.²²



Joseph Francel

In 1869, Frances Fischl (1852-1925), from Bohemia, was married to Achille Baer in Cheyenne, WY. They had 7 sons and 2 daughters. Achille Baer (1831-1900) operated butcher shops in the frontier towns of Cheyenne in Wyoming Territory and Red Jacket, Michigan, before moving his family to Denver, Colorado. Their grandson Max Baer became a Heavyweight Champion of the World.²³



In 1884, Josef Emanuel Scholz (1855-1941) immigrated to Ashley, Wyoming. In 1890, George Rezac (b. 1873), a native of Milwaukee, WI, of Bohemian ancestry, came to Rock Springs, WY, where he became a stenographer in the Union Pacific railroad offices and remained there for 11 years; he previously lived in Nebraska. Subsequently he removed to Idaho.²⁴ In 1891, Elizabeth Killian (1866-1922), of Bohemia, married Nicholas Kappes in Rock Springs, WY. They had 5 children, all born there. She also died in Rock Springs. In 1896, Alexander Arthur Mashek (1868-1940), of Bohemia, married Grace Clare Ryder in Lusk, Wyoming and they had 7 children. Prior to 1906, Adolph Jankovský (1863-1930), from Prague, Bohemia resided in Casper and then in Cheyenne, WY, having come there from IA where he originally immigrated; in 1906 he moved to Colorado.



Another Czech pioneer worth mentioning in Wyoming, although we don't know for sure when he moved there, was James Mattas. He was born in Bohemia, around 1855, and immigrated to the US at an early age. He grew up in California but heard the call of the northwest and settled in Rawlins, WY, where he became an important saddle maker. He married Mattie in 1881 and they had a son named Frank, who worked for his father at Mattas Saddlery and eventually took over the business. His "rare vintage Wyoming saddles," which are now considered antique, are occasionally being sold on Internet.²⁵

Alaska



Thaddeus Haenke (1761-1817), a native of Chřibská, Bohemia, was a physician, botanist, chemist and explorer. In 1791 he participated in the Malaspina Expedition from Santiago, Chile, along the West Coast of South and Central America, North America to Alaska.²⁶ Haenke Island in Yakutat Bay in southeastern Alaska was named in his honor. In 1878, Heinrich Klutschak (1848-1890), of Prague, artist, adventurer and explorer, took part in Frederick Schwatka's Expedition to Alaska and the northern Polar regions, as a draftsman and surveyor.²⁷ In 1895, Bedřich and Edward Mareš, from Bohemia, reportedly, went to

Alaska and found gold there.



In 1897, Frances Sedlacek, later known as Fannie Quigley (1870-1844), a native of Wahoo, NE, of Czech parents, at the age of twenty-seven, followed the stampede to the Klondike, AL. There she developed the knack of being the first on the scene of a new gold strike. She hiked in dragging her sled laden with a tent, Yukon stove, and supplies, and hanging out her shingle for "Meals." Far from Dawson, her efforts earned top dollar and her nickname, "Fannie the Hike." She also had her own free miner's certificate. Fannie staked a claim in August 1900 on a stampede to Clear Creek, a tributary of the Stewart River, 125 miles from Dawson, where she must have also met the dapper Angus McKenzie. They were married on October 1, 1900, just a few days after her return to Dawson. In January, 1903, Fannie left Angus and the Klondike and set off

on an 800 mile hike down the Yukon to Rampart. From Rampart she followed the stampede to the Tanana, and was soon in the town of Chena. In August, 1906, Fannie struck out for the new Kantishna diggings, recently discovered by Joe Quigley, and others. It was the beginning of Fannie's pursuit of mining, and her hopes for a profit from her years of effort.

She staked her share of mining claims, and mined them, and although she never shot an animal until she arrived in Kantishna, her prowess as a hunter became legendary throughout the Alaskan territory. She swore, used foul and gruff language, and wore rough men's clothing. Her drinking habits were legendary. Unable and unwilling to adapt to civilization, she preferred the life in the open. She was there to greet

Bradford Washburn when he descended from his successful summit climb on Denali in 1942, just as she had greeted the successful Denali climbing party of Hudson Stuck thirty years before. She died alone in her cabin in the summer of 1944.²⁸

British Columbia and Northwest Territories, Canada

Thaddeus Haenke (1761-1817), botanist, physician and explorer, mentioned earlier, arrived with the Malaspina expedition, on 12 August, 1791, in Nootka Sound, B.C., where Pedro de Alberni was in charge of the Spanish settlement of Santa Cruz de Nutka. Here Haenke enlarged his collections, classifying specimens according to the Linnaean system. His results form the oldest systematic ordering and cataloguing of the botanical species of present-day western Canada. Haenke was disappointed in his relatively small collection of plants; he could not find many species distinct from those of Europe, but he did discover a great number of conifers which differed from European varieties, and also found that the natives used spruce beer as an effective antiscorbutic. While he was in Nootka Sound Haenke continued his observation of the coastal Indians and recorded some of the music of the local Nootkas.²⁹

Francis Xavier Richter (1837-1910), apart from his ventures in the State of Washington, later he became a pioneer settler, miner and rancher in British Columbia, Canada, after settling in the Similkameen Country of the Southern Interior of British Columbia in 1864. He had five daughters and six sons.³⁰

His youngest son, Frank Richter, Jr. (1910-1977), born in Keremeos, BC, was a cattle rancher and fruit grower. He became a Canadian politician, who served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly and Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Mines in the Social Credit government of W.A.C. Bennett in the province of British Columbia. He represented the riding of Similkameen from 1953 to 1966 and its successor riding Boundary-Similkameen from 1966 to 1975. He died at Brentwood Bay at the age of 67.

In 1872, Bohuslav Kroupa (1838-1912), of Prague, Bohemia, illustrator, traveler, author and lecturer, traveled with Commission of Sanford Fleming through Canada. He knew the Northwest and the American cowboy and Indian as intimately as any native. He illustrated the publication *From Ocean to Ocean; Sanford Fleming's Expedition through Canada*.³¹

In 1930s, Jan 'Eskimo' Welzl (1868-1948), the immensely popular Czech traveler, adventurer, hunter, gold-digger, and Eskimo chief, of Zábřeh, Moravia, lived among Eskimos in Yukon Territory. He died in Dawson City, Yukon's capitol in 1948.³²

Jan 'Eskimo' Welzl statue in his hometown Zábřeh



Epilogue

The Czech pioneers in the American Northwest were all rugged individuals, who lived under the most adverse conditions, yet they persevered and, against all odds, hailed impressive accomplishments, proving again the old Czech saying: “Češi se nikdy ve světě neztratí” (Czechs won’t ever get lost in the entire world).

ENDNOTES

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⁹ William Farrand Prosser, *A History of the Puget Sound Country, Its Resources, Its Commerce and Its People*. New York – Chicago: the Lewis Publishing Co., 1903, vol. 2, pp. 537-538.

¹⁰ Richard F. Steele, *An Illustrated History of The Big Bend Country, embracing Lincoln, Douglas, Adams and Franklin Counties, State of Washington*. Spokane, WA: Western Historical Publishing Co., 1904, Vol. 2, p. 732.

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¹⁷ Rose Rosicky, *A History of Czechs (Bohemians) in Nebraska*. Omaha: Czech Historical Society of Nebraska, 1929, p. 45.

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²⁰ Joaquin Miller, *op. cit.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Joseph Francl, *op. cit.*

²³ Nat Fleischer, Max Baer -The Glamour Boy of the Ring. New York: Press of C. J. O'Brien, Inc.,1941.

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