

NEBRASKA SVU Chapter and a Small Excursion into the Past and Future

The Czech Language and Culture Program will celebrate 110 years of its existence in the fall 2017 semester. The Program is one of few in the United States that offer three levels of Czech language every year. It collaborates with other departments, notably History and Political Sciences, to provide instruction and choices to students who minor in Czech.

The Czech Program at our university went through rough times. First, in the beginning, in 1907, Nebraska's Czech community had to prove to the university chancellor and to the state legislature that Czech was a language cultured enough to be included in the university curriculum. It was the Czech legislators who swayed their colleagues (and some say they did it with an underhanded maneuver) to vote for the Czech program in exchange for a tax exemption for the Burlington Railroad. The Czech language proposal passed and the Burlington exemption did not. Some allege there was Burlington money passed around, and the Czechs revealed it only after the Czech language got a positive vote.

In 1919 the Czech Program was in danger of being discontinued. Its teacher, Dr. Šárka Hrbková, a native of Cedar Rapids, was fired. She was involved in the university feminist movement that was able to obtain female restrooms in addition to the one that existed since 1869. She also collaborated with the university's anti-German groups, reporting on pro-German activities. After learning about plans to close the Czech Program, the Czech community mobilized in its defense. After intense negotiations, Professor Orin Štěpánek arrived to continue the Program. He returned to do so from Prague, where he was studying Slavic Languages. He was a veteran of World War I who served as an American-born volunteer in the Czechoslovak Legion.



Now let's jump ahead 72 years: In 1993, the University tried to discontinue the Czech Program on the basis of low enrollment and a need to lower expenses in the Department of Modern Languages. The Czech community, led by Evelyn Caha, mobilized once again. The students who were then enrolled in Czech testified before University governance bodies, and in the end the Program was restored—but only as a part of Continuing Education instruction delivered in the evenings. Káťa and Jim Koubek recruited students and taught the classes for a number of years for the paltry pay in that academic division. The Czech Language Foundation was formed to communicate with the University and to protect the Program.

The Czech Komensky Club, founded at the University of Nebraska in 1904, restarted its busy program in 1989, when Mila Saskova-Pierce was hired to teach mainly Russian and as chair of the Uncommonly Taught Languages Section. In 2001 the Czech Komensky Club and Czech Language Foundation sponsored and organized SVU's 2001 North American Conference in Lincoln. The conference was a success, and it energized the Nebraska Czech community, the Komensky Club and the Czech Language Program.

The Nebraska Chapter of SVU formed, with Jitka Stiles and Cathy Oslzly at its head. When Cathy Oslzly retired from the Nebraska SVU, the Komensky Club took over the organization of cultural events at the University and in Lincoln. About ten events a year were offered to the Czech community as well as to SVU Nebraska members.

In 2003 Czech classes were transferred from the Division of Continuing Education back to the Department of Modern Languages, and in 2007 the Czech Republic's Ministry of Education, and Sports, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through its representative, Zdeněk Lyčka, sent an offer to provide a qualified teacher of Czech. The latest lecturer, Dr. Hana Waisserova, has been a very active instructor with a knack for working with both the Nebraska Czech community and

other University departments. An SVU vice-president and an experienced teacher, she took over the cultural program and merged the efforts of the Komensky Club with the Nebraska SVU. Once again this fall, SVU Nebraska and the Czech Komensky Club plan a robust program.

In August 2017, Dr. Martina Klicperova will present a lecture in English based on her books, notably *Psychologie demokracie, transformace a totality*. On the evening of October 22, 2017, at the annual Czech Language Foundation Banquet, Dr. Mila Saskova-Pierce will be officially installed as the Honorary Consul of the Czech Republic for the state of Nebraska. Various Czech dignitaries will be in attendance, including Dr. Borek Lizec, the General Consul of the Czech Republic in Chicago, and, hopefully, the new Czech Ambassador, Dr. Hynek Kmoníček. The banquet will also celebrate 110 years of Czech language and culture instruction at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In the spring, the Czech Program, together with the Department of History, will host a conference dealing with Czechoslovakia in 1948 and 1968. Please consider the call for papers issued for this conference! We are planning other events and promise an interesting academic year of programs in 2017-2018 for all who are interested!

Mila Saskova-Pierce, Lincoln, Nebraska.



Sarah Hrbek (Dr. Šárka Hrbková) in the middle



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