

# Chicago Czechs, Country Cottages, and the 1929 Crash: A Personal Story

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This is the second half of a two-part series of my paper delivered at the June 24-25, 2019 Conference of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts & Sciences at Chicago's John Marshall Law School. The original paper began with this statement:

*All my paternal and maternal grandparents emigrated from Bohemia to the United States in 1891. Born in Chicago in 1935 as a third-generation Czech, I spent every summer of my boyhood in a Czech community in Illinois called Rest Haven Beach, located on the Kankakee River sixty miles southwest of the city and three miles south of Wilmington. As a boy, I thought it natural that almost every family in Rest Haven was Czech. As an adult, I wondered how that happened? Why had so many Czechs bought land there in the 1920s? What legal consequences did they suffer when the Great Depression kept them from building on their property and even from paying back taxes? Telling that story involves telling a personal story, which Naše rodina will publish in two parts:*

Part I – “Before the Crash” – was published in Naše rodina, Volume 32, No. 1 March 2020. It told how Bohemians in the Chicago area were induced to buy vacation property in Rest Haven Beach during the prosperous 1920s. It describes the role of a Cicero newspaper that promoted the sale, and the paper lists names and addresses of those (including my grandparents) who bought lots before the stock market crash in October, 1929.

This concluding half, Part II – “After the Crash,” tells what happened to the property sellers and buyers after the Great Depression hit the nation in the 1930s. The primary seller did very well, moving to Beverly Hills, California. While numerous buyers lost their original investments, many others (including my grandparents and my parents) eventually built cottages and

enjoyed summer vacations in the “New Bohemian Resort” on the Kankakee River.

## Part II—After the Crash

### Creating Rest Haven Beach: Phase 3, 1930

Martha Gilbert had enjoyed such success selling lots during 1927, that she bought another parcel of land along the Kankakee River from Levi Ducharme. She subdivided that parcel in 1928, labeled Rest Haven Beach, Phase 2. Mr. Ducharme must have regretted not getting in on a good thing, for he decided to create his own addition to Rest Haven Beach. On April 25, 1930, W.K. Woodruff filed a plat survey of 36.8 acres of Ducharme's remaining land along Elmwood Avenue.<sup>36</sup> See Figure 1.



Figure 1: Ducharme's Subdivision, 1930

Ducharme subdivided his acreage into 10 Blocks, each with 6 to 18 lots for a total of 129. His land was less desirable than Martha Gilbert's. Large swatches north of Elmwood Avenue were very sandy and unpleasantly hilly. Most unfortunately for Mr. Ducharme, he laid out his subdivision in the spring of 1930, six months after the 1929 collapse of the stock market, and eventually paid a high price for his unlucky timing.

### The Depression's Impact

Looking backward in time, we shudder today at the

thought of buying vacation property in the late 1920s, just years or perhaps months ahead of the stock market crash in October, 1929. The crash quickly ruined those whose wealth derived from market speculation or business advertising. The *Suburban Leader* was gone in December. The Depression itself took years to ruin others' lives. The unemployment rate of 3 percent in 1929 grew to 8.7 percent in 1930, 15.8 in 1931, 23.5 in 1932, and 24.8 in 1933 before starting a slow decline.<sup>37</sup> In *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, Alex Gottfried wrote:

Chicago was one of the hardest hit of all major cities as, in general, urban areas suffered much more than rural communities. By October, 1932, the general estimate of Chicago unemployed was approximately 750,000 (of the national total of eight million), while only 800,000 were still employed. Of this number, a large percentage worked only part time. . . . Hundreds of thousands lived in the ugly shadow of starvation, cold, nakedness.<sup>38</sup>

Czechs who had plunked down hundreds of dollars for summer living in Rest Haven Beach, "The New Bohemian Resort," focused simply on feeding, housing, and clothing their families. Numerous buyers in 1929 defaulted on their \$7.00 monthly payments and lost their principal. Those who bought in 1927 or 1928 had probably paid off the cost of their lots before the crash. However, most would have delayed building on their property. During the depression, few Czechs could afford to vacation in the countryside—or to pay county taxes on their property, even at the risk of losing it at a tax sale.<sup>39</sup>

On September 21, 1938, a Joliet newspaper, *The Farmers' Weekly Review*, published a "Delinquent Tax List" showing all property in Will County "upon which the taxes remain due and unpaid, the names of the owners as far as known, the amount of

taxes thereon, all of said taxes being for the year of A.D. 1937 and previous years as noted."<sup>40</sup> The list ran over four and one-half full-size newspaper pages. It ended by noting that the lands listed would be sold for payment of back taxes plus .26 per parcel on October 1, 1938 at the Will County Courthouse.

Pages 4 and 5 of *The Farmers' Weekly Review*, documented how the Great Depression snuffed out dreams of many Czechs who bought lots in Rest Haven Beach. The paper named 225 people who owed back taxes on their neglected property. Consider the case of Anna Pokorny, reported in the boxed column of Figure 2. Anna owned two adjoining lots, 28 and 29, in Block 7, on which she owed back taxes of \$1.58 each, or \$3.16—about \$56 today. That seems like a small enough sum to preserve her original investment in the late 1920s. But Anna's debt occurred during the depression, when money was scarce and prospects were slim for building on the land. She did manage to pay those 1937 back taxes and was not a delinquent taxpayer in the 1938 list of September 27, 1939. Indeed, on August 2, 1939, *The Farmers' Weekly Review* reported that each lot had an assessed valuation of \$35, about \$625 today. Nevertheless, Anna never built on her property, which she apparently sold by 1942. Figure 2 reports on only one person who still held property bought before the crash. Others may have succeeded in unloading their lots via classified ads.<sup>41</sup>

A statistical summary of all 225 tax-delinquent properties reveals the extent of broken dreams—for property sellers as well as buyers. First the sellers: Martha Gilbert owed back taxes (\$75.96) on only five of her original 562 lots, having sold nearly all of them. Ducharme sold only about 20 percent of his 129 lots and owed back taxes on 100 in the amount of \$345.61

Back Tax 2.40 Rest Haven Beach Sub. N. E. 1/4 Sec. 13, T. 32, R. 9, 30 5	8-852 Anna Pokorny, 1229 Wisconsin Ave., Berwyn, Ill. 1.58	Rest Haven Beach Sub. 13, T. 32, R. 9, 17 8
8-774 Joseph Srejima, 2432 S. 58th Ct. Cicero, Ill. Back Tax 6.91 Rest Haven Beach Sub. N. E. 1/4 Sec. 13, T. 32, R. 9, 34 5	Rest Haven Beach Sub. N. E. 1/4 Sec. 13, T. 32, R. 9, 28 7	Chicago, Ill. Back Tax 3.76
8-781 Elsa Schwachtgen 12908 Elm St.	8-853 Anna Pokorny, 1229 Wisconsin Ave., Berwyn, Ill. 1.58	Rest Haven Beach Sub. N. E. 1/4 Sec. 13, T. 32, R. 9, 18 8
	Rest Haven Beach Sub. N. E. 1/4 Sec. 13, T. 32, R. 9 29 7	8-901 Gerhard M & Amelia Madsen, 79 W. 34th St., Steger, Ill Back Tax 9.95

Figure 2: Portion of Delinquent Tax List in 1938 Farmers' Weekly

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(about \$6,200 today). A 1940s Wesley Township survey showed both parcels of Ducharme's land taken over by Kankakee's Mount Grove Cemetery Association, which often swooped up land for unpaid taxes.<sup>42</sup> Taxes on his undeveloped farmland would have been miniscule.<sup>43</sup>

If Martha Gilbert failed to pay her back taxes in 1938 and forfeited her five Rest Haven Beach lots, she was probably unconcerned. Having profited from selling over 500 lots, she had already fled Illinois for a sunnier climate. On April 4, 1930, she was living in Los Angeles with her husband and son in a rented house.<sup>44</sup> By 1940, they moved up to their own house in Beverly Hills. A poorer Levi Ducharme, on the other hand, still lived in the Rest Haven area, and did so until his death in 1947.<sup>45</sup>

**Now the buyers:** Like seller Levi Ducharme, many buyers owed back taxes. Appendix III (not included here) lists 120 delinquent owners of Rest Haven Beach lots with their names and addresses. (It excludes 105 lots still owned by Ducharme and Gilbert.) Only three of Ducharme's few buyers were tax delinquent, while 56 of Gilbert's many buyers owed back taxes on 117 lots. Most (33) owed on more than two; one family owed on nine. Of the 120 tax delinquents, half had Czech names; others certainly had maternal Czech heritage. While the Depression ended many Czechs' dreams, it only postponed those of others. After the worst was over, scores of Czechs eventually turned Rest Haven Beach into a Bohemian enclave.

The residents' Czechoslovakian heritage showed in *The Farmers' Weekly* 1939 list of assessed property values.<sup>46</sup> For us, the list's assessments was less important than naming who owned each of the 691 lots—comprised of 400 lots in phase 1 of Martha Gilbert's 1927 subdivision, 162 in phase 2 of 1928, and 129 in Levi Ducharme's 1930 subdivision addition. Virtually all of Martha Gilbert's lots had been bought by 1939; only 4 remained in her name. In 1939, Levi Ducharme still owned 103 of his 129 lots.<sup>47</sup> Excluding those 107 owned by Gilbert and Ducharme, 58 percent of the other 584 lot owners appeared to be Czech or Slovak.<sup>48</sup> Given that many other owners had similar heritage on their maternal side, at least two-thirds of Rest Haven Beach was owned by Czechoslovak-Americans.

### **The Bohemian Connection: Missing Pieces**

Enough pieces of the puzzle are in place to see *how* Rest Haven Beach was marketed to Bohemians. However, we lack pieces that tell us *why* it was marketed to Bohe-

mians. Let us review what we know for certain:

1. Martha S. Gilbert, Rest Haven Beach's creator and lot grantor, had no apparent Czech ancestry.<sup>49</sup>
2. Initial newspaper advertisements for Rest Haven Beach (July 5, 1927 to July 5, 1928) made no reference to "Bohemian" – neither in the Chicago Heights *Star* nor in the Cicero *Suburban Leader*.
3. Lot sales were progressing well enough by advertising to the general population that lot prices increased from \$89.50 to \$99.00 on May 30, 1929.

Nevertheless, on July 12, 1928, the *Suburban Leader* refocused its advertising, now promoting Rest Haven Beach as "The New Bohemian Resort." What caused the change in an apparently successful advertising campaign? One possibility is that Cepak – and the *Suburban Leader* – had reached an accord with Martha Gilbert, taking over Rest Haven Beach advertising and perhaps buying the newspaper a share in the "Bohemian resort." Earlier, the paper repeatedly claimed that it was doing a public service for its readers and did not make "a penny profit" in the process. Nevertheless, someone was paying for the free lunches and bus rides from the *Suburban Leader's* office to what had become the "**Suburban Leader Summer Resort.**"

The advertising switch in July 12, 1928, also marked the first mention of William Cepak, the newspaper's Czech publisher. The paper's masthead carried other Czech names: Charles M. Kotrba, Special Representative; and Arthur W. Vanek, Lawndale Representative. Did some collective sense of Bohemian pride produce the change in focus? Or was someone else involved? A detective might ask whether there was any well-connected Chicagoland Bohemian who both (a) had an intimate knowledge of the Kankakee River and the Wilmington area and (b) was involved in the real estate business. The obvious suspect was Anton Čermák, the most powerful Czech in Chicago politics.

Anton Čermák, came from Braidwood, a small town five miles southwest of Wilmington and the Kankakee River. A first-generation immigrant, Čermák went to school in Braidwood and worked in its coal mines before going to Chicago. He was elected President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners in 1922, became Chairman of the county Democratic Party in 1928, and elected Mayor of Chicago in 1931. (In 1932, an assassin in Florida, presumably aiming at President Roosevelt, shot Čermák, who died days later.)

In 1908 (before his political career) Čermák created a real estate firm, Cermak and Serhant. Joseph W. Serhant (Šerhant) ran the business after Čermák engaged in politics and continued it after his assassination. Cermak and Serhant advertised in the *Suburban Leader*, see Figure 3.

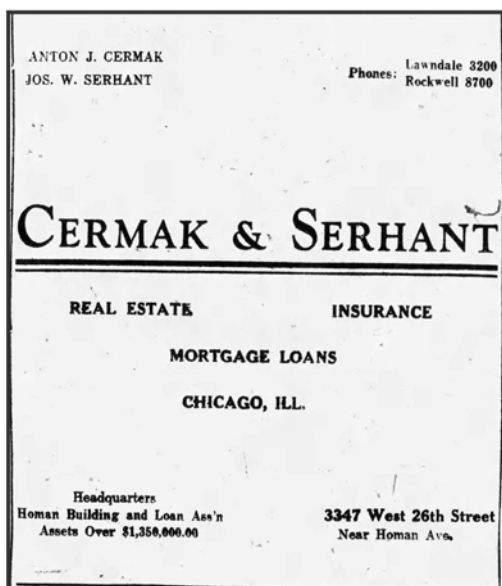


Figure 3: Advertisement, June 6, 1929

It is reasonable to suspect that a politically-connected Czech in the real estate business who grew up near the Kankakee River would have interests in selling Rest Haven Beach lots to Bohemians. However tantalizing the possibility of Čermák’s connection to the new advertising focus, nothing could be established. The link did not connect, despite criminal evidence decades later that involved the firm.<sup>50</sup>

Continuing along the detective angle, we might reformulate Sherlock Holmes’ question: “Why didn’t the dog bark in the night?” Why were there no Rest Haven Beach advertisements in the *Denní Hlasatel*, the largest Czech language newspaper in Chicago? Even after the *Suburban Leader* had designated it as the “New Bohemian Resort,” the *Denní Hlasatel* ran no ads about Rest Haven Beach.<sup>51</sup> On July 11, 1929, however, the *Hlasatel* did publish a full-page advertisement for a competing development some 50 miles northwest of the city. Readers were invited to visit Algonquin Hills, “**Do nejkrásnějšího místa v metropolitním Chicagu**” (To the most beautiful place in metropolitan Chicago). While using the Czech language entirely, the ad did not

portray Algonquin Hills as a Bohemian community.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps the dog didn’t bark because the *Suburban Leader* was *Denní Hlasatel*’s competitor. The *Leader*’s publisher, William Cepak, would have to buy advertising in a competing local newspaper. Indeed, the *Denní Hlasatel* might not have even allowed the ad, given that Rest Haven Beach was a *Suburban Leader* business. Ironically, it survived the newspaper after the 1929 stock market crash.

## Surviving the Depression and Building

The rare early Bohemians who built cottages in Rest Haven Beach before the crash had few neighbors, and the Depression stalled subsequent construction. My Worel grandparents bought their lots in 1928, and somehow the bad times did not deter them for long. By 1932, when the national unemployment rate was about 23.5 percent, they already had their summer *chata* in Rest Haven. I don’t know exactly when děde Worel built it, but the photo in Figure 4, dated May, 1932, shows him (age 62) and babi Worel (55) sitting outside the cottage with my three-year-old sister, Ruth. (The photograph was taken from the north side of their house, at the entry to the kitchen).



Figure 4: Grandparents Worel and My Sister Outside Cottage in Rest Haven

The Worel cottage had electric service but no running water. Instead, it had a hand pump over a sink piped into a cesspool, which needed periodic cleaning. In keeping with the covenant against “privies,” it had an

indoor toilet flushed with buckets of water filled from the hand pump. Built only for summer use, the cottage had no heating except for a kitchen wood stove, used all summer long for cooking. Its three tiny bedrooms were for the six adults, and the four children slept on the porch. Its dining room tightly seated all ten people around an oval table.

I don't have a good picture of the cottage, but Figure 5 shows the south side decades later in the winter. (To my knowledge, no human being *ever* entered the house through that door. Theoretically, it opened into a porch with cots, but one cot was always placed horizontally across the door that never opened.) Although I was born in November, 1935, family photos prove that I spent the summer of 1936 in that cottage with grandparents Worel, four Zelenkas (uncle, aunt, and two cousins), and my parents and sister. Our grandparents spoke Czech with the adults but English to the kids.



Figure 5: Southern View of Worel Cottage in Rest Haven

Today I marvel that my grandfather built that cottage during the midst of the Great Depression. True, he was a cabinet maker, and he had help from his sons-in-law: my uncle (a draftsman) and my father (also an electrician). Nevertheless, they all lived 60 miles away in the city and could only work on it during weekends and on vacations. Given that my grandfather Worel emigrated to America at age 21, he certainly had clear memories of the old country and probably retained Bohemian pride in owning a *chata*. It helped that my grandmother took the initiative by answering the

ad. They succeeded when the economic downturn prevented other lot owners from fulfilling their dreams.

It is unknown how many Czech lot-buyers failed to build on their properties, but we can report on two families who lost out. The Grantor Index shows that on June 4, 1928, James and Helen Sladek of Detroit bought lots 49 and 50 in Block 1 on the corner of Grand and Stewart Avenues, which was on the opposite side (west) of my grandparents' corner. The Sladek's neighboring lots were still vacant in the mid-1930s when my parents contemplated building their own summer home. On August 17, 1937, the Sladeks granted their lots to John F. and Bessie R. Janda for \$10 (about \$175 today). By July, 1938, my father had laid out the foundation for his house.

The other buyer who failed to build was John Jerousek of Cicero (named as an "owner" in the *Suburban Leader* ad). He owned lots 47 and 48 between our house and my grandparent's cottage. After dying in 1935, his widow and children granted my parents a deed to the lots for \$40 on July 7, 1939.<sup>53</sup> What seems small today was about \$700 then. In result, my parents and grandparents owned all eight lots from 43 to 50 in Block 1, meaning that they owned all the frontage on Grand Avenue from Stewart to Hickory Avenues. Figure 7 displays the locations of both houses in the Rest Haven Beach Subdivision. My parents added fruit trees to my grandparents' orchard between the houses.

Aided by relatives and friends, my father built a more substantial house (Figure 6) than my grandfather. Prepared for living year-round, it had running water, a flush toilet, a septic tank instead of a cesspool, an oil-



Figure 6: Janda House in Rest Haven



burning space heater, and a propane gas stove. It also had a poured-concrete half-basement, cinder-block construction up to the first floor, and an attic. Stairs led to the main floor, with a tiny kitchen, dining room, two bedrooms, and a porch. (As in our grandparents' house, the outside door to the porch on the south was for show, not for entry. Only strangers knocked on that door. Friends entered through the back and the kitchen.) More modern homes were being built in Chicago, but ours—with its asbestos siding, a basement, and an attic—was up-to-date for the time and place.

By 1939, the Janda family began spending sum-

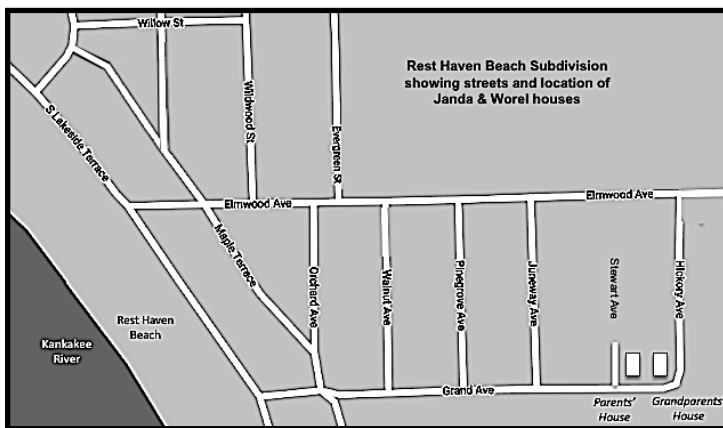


Figure 7: Rest Haven in the 1940s. The Rest Haven Beach Subdivision.

mers in their own house on the corner of Grand and Stewart Avenues. The Worels continued living with the Zelenkas on the corner of Grand and Hickory Avenues. Calling them “avenues” makes them sound like streets in a town, but Rest Haven’s roads were unpaved, they had no lamp posts, and its houses had no numbers. Our mail address was Rural Route #1. In an ordinary car, the mailman drove west along Elmwood Avenue to Lakeside Terrace and then south. Mail was delivered to boxes on posts. Our mail box on the corner of Elmwood and Hickory was numbered 140-A.

The avenues were only gravel roads without curbs, and they did not always match the 1927 plat survey. Stewart Avenue did not run through to Elmwood Avenue as shown on the plat, because a swamp bordered Elmwood from Juneway to Hickory. Stewart Avenue stopped at the end of my family’s property, as shown in Figure 7. Likewise, Juneway Avenue, which ran from Elmwood to Grand in the plat, did not go all the way through to Grand. A sand dune at the corner of Grand

and Juneway was impassable to automobiles but provided untold hours of playing pleasure for kids like me. I was seven years old in the summer of 1942, the first year after the start of World War II.

## World War II and the New Bohemian Resort

Although the U.S. did not enter the war until December 7, 1941, the country began preparing for involvement in 1939, when Germany marched into Poland, causing Britain and France to declare war on Germany. World War II changed the character of nearby Wilmington. In September 1940 the United States acquired almost 37,000 acres a few miles north of Wilmington to build what became the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant, which employed over 10,000 people during the war.<sup>54</sup> The government built housing projects north and south of the city to house plant workers. Between 1930 and 1950, Wilmington’s population almost doubled, from 1,741 to 3,354. Other workers drove down from Joliet or found housing elsewhere in Will County.

Some employees at the Joliet Arsenal (its later designation) found homes in Rest Haven Beach for their 20 minute commute to work, driving to Wilmington on State Route 113N and then to the Arsenal.<sup>55</sup> Their residence had two consequences: (1) some houses became occupied throughout the year, and (2) most residents were not Czechs.

Also, as the economy picked up, non-Czechs in the Chicago area started looking for vacation homes and bought or built houses in the subdivision. My parents’ closest friends had names like Anderson and Foster. Nevertheless, in the summers during the war years, Rest Haven Beach remained largely a Czech community and lived up to its designation as “The New Bohemian Resort” – more than a decade later than intended.

Although I only spent four preteen years living in Rest Haven during the war, my memories of its character as a “Bohemian” area—ethnically, not artistically—are vivid and multifaceted. The Burian family lived north of us, the Tureks lived to the northwest—just east of the Schusters, while the Drasals lived down the hill, followed by families with names like Vancura, Granzig, Jamostny, Mikuleky, Bouse, Hlad, Fencl, and others. Unlike us, very few Czechs lived in Rest Haven throughout the year.<sup>56</sup> However, they vacationed there the entire summer—from the end of the spring school term to the beginning of the fall term. In the typical case, the father would drive the family to Rest Haven

after school was over, drop off the wife and children to stay the summer, return Sunday evening to work in the Chicago area, drive down every Friday evening—and repeat the process throughout the summer, except for the father also spending his two-week vacation with the family.

Readers today might question the feasibility of a 60-mile weekly commute between Chicago and Rest Haven Beach. It worked out well in practice. My uncle and my father did it for years, driving separately from their Chicago homes. The drive took a little more than an hour. I rode it myself countless times from the late 1930s to the mid-1940s. As we traveled from Joliet to Wilmington and drove past the Joliet Arsenal, I was entranced by the sentries posted at searchlight-topped guard towers behind barbed-wire chain-link fences—proof that we were at war.

The summer residents of Rest Haven—mostly the Bohemians—had organized the “Rest Haven Beach Improvement Club.” Its meetings were conducted in English and Czech. My father served as president for most—if not all—of its existence. He also took notes at the meetings, reproduced the minutes using a wax pad for spirit duplication, and distributed them to the members. The Improvement Club met in Rest Haven during the summer and in locations around Chicago during the winter. The Club had two main objectives. The first was to maintain the beach and the extensive public park, about 150’ wide, that ran between the Kankakee River and Blocks 8 and 9—the two most desirable blocks facing the river. The center lots in Block 8 were directly across from the beach. Figure 8, taken about 1937, shows my mother and sister in the water in front of the beach, with two cottages in Block 8 built on the edge of the park. Later, other cottages lined the park along Blocks 8 and 9.

The Club’s second major objective was running two successful picnics on July 4<sup>th</sup> and Labor Day. The picnics conjoined two purposes—to have fun and to raise money for improvements. The 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnic “officially” opened the vacation season while the Labor Day picnic certified its ending. The Club planned these picnics as civic events and carried them out like Czech festivals—boisterously. Of course, all summer vacationers attended, and the picnics attracted guests from miles around. Tabloid-sized signs on colored backgrounds were printed and posted on telephone poles on the highway between Wilmington and Kankakee, which had over 20,000 people in 1940. My father, who was by that time a radio and sound technician in Chi-



Figure 8: Rest Haven Beach Scene

cago, installed a public address system on the beach to announce the various contests (three-legged races) and to tell how to buy tickets for purchasing food (hamburgers and hot dogs) and beer, of course—not in bottles but from barrels.

Women prepared and served food at the concession stand, while men bought and tapped the kegs and served the beer. All labor was volunteered and most—but not all—workers came from Czech families. The public address system played 78 rpm records loud enough to hear all over Rest Haven. The music rotated between popular American tunes in the 1930s/1940s and pre-war Czech recordings of polkas and waltzes. The speakers blasted out familiar Czech melodies like *Džulajda* (a



Figure 9: 78 RPM Record Made in Pre-War Czechoslovakia

girl's name) and *Švestková Álej* (Prune Alley). Some records were made in Czechoslovakia, such as *Podzimní Polka* (Autumn Polka), shown in Figure 9. Festivities lasted past midnight, thanks to lights over the surrounding picnic tables. The numerous non-Czechs who attended the picnics could not help but becoming Bohemian for the day—and night.

Unfortunately, I could not find any photos of the activities. Lacking cell phones, people then did not take such pictures often in daylight and rarely at night. Rest Haven Beach held public picnics only twice each summer. For smaller gatherings, it built about a 75' x75' hall with a bar and dance floor on four sandy Ducharme lots at the end of Evergreen Road, hundreds of feet from the nearest cottage to allow for partying into the evening.<sup>57</sup> Called the "Kickers' Club," it was used for week-end parties and family parties. A free juke box supplied the music. My grandparents celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in the Kickers' Club in 1951, and it was the site of my Slovak wife's bridal shower in 1961.

### The Bohemian Resort's Demise

The Rest Haven Beach picnics declined in spirit and attendance in the late 1950s. Two factors mentioned earlier—that some houses were occupied throughout the year and that most of their inhabitants were not Czechs—contributed to the decline. City people who traveled to Rest Haven for vacations sought summer fun, which they found in organizing summer picnics. Those living there year around did not enjoy such work. As the proportion of Czechs dwindled among Rest Haven inhabitants, so did the spirit of ethnic camaraderie that bonded together the members of the Rest Haven Beach Improvement Club. Gradually, the area lost its unique Bohemian identity.

Aging also gradually took its toll. In the early 1940s, the fathers in their 40s—who voluntarily mowed the park, replenished the beach sand, repaired the service buildings, put out the raft on the river in the summer, and took it in the fall—were now in their 50s. Grandparents who may have bought the lots for their children's families when they were in their 60s were now in their 70s or older or gone. The children who were supposed to benefit from summers in the country also aged. The preteens

who loved the Rest Haven Beach picnics became post-teens who preferred doing other things.

These dynamics took place in my life too. I was seven years old in 1942, the first summer after WWII began, and only ten when it ended in 1945. When I was twelve in 1947, we moved permanently from Chicago to Rest Haven. I left the 7<sup>th</sup> grade of Chicago's William Penn Grammar School, which had about 1,400 students, to enter a one-room country school two miles from Rest Haven with fifteen students. I was the only pupil in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and none of my countryside classmates were Czech. In 1949 at age 14, I entered Wilmington High School. By the time I graduated in 1953, the picnics had already declined in importance to me and to my father, who then worked in electronics at the Joliet Arsenal. He was no longer just visiting Rest Haven on summer weekends.

In 1961, when I completed graduate school and got married, the Kickers' Club still functioned, but the summer revelry ended as the vacationers aged. After grandmother Worel died in 1958, the Zelenka family took over the Worel cottage. In 1978, my parents sold their house and moved to Florida. The Zelenkas left by the mid 1980s and their cottage was soon leveled. My parents' former house survived a fire, was remodeled, and still stood as of June 15, 2019, when I visited Rest Haven Beach for probably the last time. Sadly, the concrete dance floor and cinder block concession stand—which remained intact during a previous visit in 2003—were in ruins, as shown in Figures 10 and 11.

More people live in Rest Haven Beach in 2019 than in 1958, and many live in newer, larger houses. Additional structures sprouted on lots that Levi Ducharme



Figure 10: Dance floor and concession stand, intact in 2003





Figure 11: Dance floor and concession stand, in ruins in 2019

failed to sell.<sup>58</sup> The main roads (Elmwood and Lakeside Terrace) are now paved, but few street signs remain. The beach area is no longer sandy and the park area is unkempt. For a time, though, Rest Haven Beach on the “**Lovely Kankakee River Near Wilmington, Illinois**” was, as advertised, the “**New Bohemian Summer Resort**” (*Nové České Letní Bydliště*).

## Endnotes

36. W.K. Woodruff filed Survey No. 444175 on September 11, 1930.
37. “Unemployment Statistics during the Great Depression,” at <https://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1528.html>.
38. Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, pp. 24-242.
39. The Will County Clerk notes, “Each year when real estate taxes are not paid on time, any unpaid balance due may be available to sell to a third party. This process is known as a Tax Sale.” See <https://www.thewillcountyclerk.com/taxes/taxes/tax-sale-redemption/>
40. *The Farmers’ Weekly Review*, began publishing in Joliet 1921. See <https://www.willcfb.com/home/weekly-review.html>. Affiliated with the Will County Farm Bureau, it is still being published.
41. A May 6, 1936 ad in the *Berwyn Life* offered four lots at a reasonable price. A year later, the *Cicero Life* on May 9, offered the same four lots using the same telephone number. A July 18, 1937 *Cicero Life* ad offered six lots, two with river frontage.
42. In a telephone conversation, Dan Hays, CEO of the Mount Grove Cemetery Association, said that at the time it often bought farmland in the surrounding area as investments, not to develop as cemeteries.
43. Historically, states have given farmland preferential tax treatment, basing taxes on productive capacity instead of market value. Ducharme’s land had low productive capacity.
44. Ancestry Internet sites document that a Martha Sandusky, born 1901, and married to Daniel G. Gilbert, gave birth to a son, Donald, on February 4, 1925 in Chicago, Illinois. That appears to be the Martha “S.” Gilbert in our story. The U.S. Census taken on April 4, 1930, shows the Gilbert family (a perfect match) renting a house at 1201 S. Longworth in Los Angeles. Her husband, Dan Gilbert, listed his occupation as “Salesman” and his industry as “Stocks.” Few stockbrokers made money in the 1929 crash. It is likely that Martha’s Rest Haven lot sales enabled the Gilbert family to move to California. In the 1940 Census, taken on May 27, the Gilberts lived in their own house in Beverly Hills.
45. Although Levi Ducharme was from Kankakee, got married there, and was buried there, the 1940 Census shows that at age 80, he was still living on his remaining property in Rest Haven with his wife, age 71.
46. The list was published on August 2, 1939. *The Farmers’ Weekly Review* functioned as a paper of record, periodically publishing lists of delinquent taxpayers and property assessments. The University of Illinois Library digitized issues of the paper from 1929 to 2011. Go to <https://idnc.library.illinois.edu/> for search it and other Illinois papers online.
47. On August 2, 1958, *The Farmers’ Weekly Review* published another property assessment for Rest Haven Beach. It showed that Martha Gilbert—who had been living in Beverly Hills for almost two decades, still owed back taxes on three lots in her name. Levi Ducharme managed to unload some of his lots by then, but he still owned 85.
48. The ethnic origin of property owners’ names was judged by sight, with questionable names checked against Leo Baca’s Czech immigration passenger list at <https://www.cgsi.org/members/passenger-ship-records>.
49. Indeed, little can be learned about her through the Internet. Newspapers.com did not turn up any mentions of them in Chicago or Suburban newspapers.
50. No evidence connected Joseph W. Serhant or his wife, a pillar of society and 1932 President of the Bohemian Women’s Civic Club to a crime. Unfortunately, their son, Robert, served a prison sentence for masterminding a \$30 million investment swindle, ruining the family’s reputation. Robert was gunned down in his Oak Brook home at age 54 in a gangland killing. His 85 year-old father J.W. was killed in the same attack. See [Art Barnum and Robert Becker](#), “Ex-Convict, Father Found Shot to Death,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 1992.
51. A scan of the microfilmed pages of *Denni Hlasatel*—the

top Czech language newspaper in the Chicago area with 50,000 circulation in 1932—showed no graphic advertisements for Rest Haven Beach from October through December 1927 nor from July 1 through August 18, 1929. The *Denní Hlasatel* microfilms were scanned at the University of Minnesota's Immigration History Research Center, with the assistance of Archivist Daniel Nečas.

52. The Algonquin Hills ad in *Denní Hlasatel* offered Rozkošné (Adorable) 50' x 150' lots for \$195, about double the \$99 cost of a single lot in Rest Haven Beach. However, the pricier Algonquin Hills lots were double the size of those in Rest Haven Beach. Most people had to buy two lots in Rest Haven Beach to build a cottage.
53. Book 846, Page 582.
54. "The Joliet Army Ammunition Plant," at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/midewin/learning/history-culture/?cid=stelprdb5155180>.
55. Rest Haven was only three miles south of Wilmington on a one-lane concrete highway, State Route 113N. Commuters to the Joliet Arsenal drove one mile on gravel roads from Rest Haven Beach just to get to Route 113N, which had only one paved driving lane. Cars traveling in opposite directions had to slide over to the gravel shoulder and drive past each other, having only the drivers' side tires on the concrete. After passing, both drivers would swing back on the pavement. Supposedly, the Illinois legislature only had funds for one two-lane highway between Wilmington and Kankakee. The highway could go either on the north or the south sides of the Kankakee River, and residents on both sides wanted it. In a Solomon-like decision, the legislature built two half-highways, each one lane wide, and named them Route 113N and Route 113S. Decades later, Route 113N from Wilmington to Kankakee was upgraded to a two-lane highway and renamed State Route 102, while Route 113S became 113.
56. Rest Haven fell within Enumeration District 99-109 for the 1940 Census. Census-takers visited there from April 19 through May 10. That was too early in the spring for most absent property owners to have reopened their unheated cottages, and few were present for enumerators to tally. But some did live there year around, as we did. They included Bohemian-born Carl and Elizabeth Martinek, at ages 68 and 62 respectively; and Steve Prahek, John Piszczek, and Alberta Motyka—all of whom were 60 or more and gave Austria as their country of birth. All were apparently retired and out of the workforce.
57. According to the 1939 assessment list in *the Farmers' Weekly*, the Kicker's Club owned lots 1 through 4 in Block 9.
58. Rest Haven Beach even had a Homeowners' Association in the 2000s, but apparently no longer. The Will County Recorder of Deeds offers online searching of records since 1965. A search of the Grantee Index for "Rest Haven Beach" found a Quit Claim deed for Block 9 Lot

2 dated July 14, 2000 naming the "Rest Haven Beach Homeowners Assn." A separate search of the Grantor Index found correspondence about the same lot between heirs of Martha S. Gilbert and the Rest Haven Beach Homeowners Assn. However, Tim McGinnis of Celtic Property Management, which is selling a house in Rest Haven, said that a homeowners' association no longer exists (telephone conversation, May 15, 2019).

### About the Author:

Kenneth Janda, is a Payson S. Wild professor emeritus (Political Science) from 2002–date at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. He obtained a B.S. degree in education from Illinois State University and a Ph.D. in Government from Indiana University. His areas of scholarly research concentrated on (a) political parties, (b) computer methods, and (c) American government, including methods of teaching. In recent years, he has been particularly interested in politics and political science in central Europe and the Soviet Union. Professor Janda has published about a dozen books and over a hundred articles and papers, see [www.janda.org](http://www.janda.org). His American government textbook, *The Challenge of Democracy: American Government in Global Politics* is entering its 14th edition. It was translated into Czech as *Vyzva Demokracie: Systém Vlády v USA*. His latest book, "The Emperor and the Peasant: The Birth of the Great War and Death of a Great Empire," was published by McFarland and Company in 2018. He and his wife traveled throughout Czechoslovakia in 1971, 1983, and 1990. They also visited the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1994, following his Fulbright year in Budapest.

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- |                         |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
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| ▪ Half Page (7"x4½")    | \$ 90  |
| ▪ Half Column (3¾"x4½") | \$ 50  |
| ▪ Column Width (3¾"x2") | \$ 35  |

Prices are per issue. All submitted advertisements must be camera-ready. Queries are free to members.

*Ads must be approved by publications committee*