

THE PAST

links with our pioneer's past is no longer vivid. For the most part, we have few "value markers" by which to perpetuate our memory of those who came before us. This narrative is an effort to safeguard and perpetuate those few existing memories of our ancestors who established our family in the United States in 1952.

(Insert ship list & related documents.) & Farming in Amherst after lumbering
The documents, photographs, and references to the past supplied in conversations with deceased relatives contained herein provide the only existing artifacts of our past through which we may learn something of our ancestors, and at the same time, perhaps, something about ourselves, as descendants. Perhaps a likeness in a photograph, or a trait reflected from our industrious and successful grandparents may bind one of us to one who came before us. Folk culture develops from those traditional beliefs, music, legends, etc. of a particular group of people in a family, or extended family, or a closely knit community which are handed down from generation to generation. Though it is constantly changing throughout the generations, vestiges will remain if succeeding generations make an effort to keep their heritage alive.

In today's diverse culture, it is difficult to discern the influence of a particular town, or area on an individual, but it was considerable on the immigrant's family history and development as he never strayed from it as we are doing today. In our family, we didn't make the effort to know our ancestors and keep their heritage alive. Instead, except for Catholicism, we probably, though perhaps inadvertently, made the effort to distance ourselves from our past. Now, nearing the end of my life, I think what a pity and loss never to have learned exactly who they were in Europe. Perhaps, it was partly due to the snobbery, and often, ridicule that was prevalent when I was an impressionable teenager. As late as 1930-1934, when I was in high school, I was called a "Bohunk" repeatedly by an English boy who sat behind me in the assembly room. The more I was embarrassed by his reference to my being of part Czechoslovakian (Bohemian) ancestry, the more he enjoyed using the intimidating reference of Bohunk. I didn't know then, as I do now, that he probably learned from the conversations in his home that being of English descent was being of superior heritage, in their opinion. Harassment and discrimination isn't new, but I didn't know what it was in those days.

Where we were born may leave certain identifiable traits with us, even in the midwest. I had always thought that the midwest was the only area in the country where the spoken word was devoid of accent. But, when traveling around the country, I've frequently been told I had a "midwest" accent, a sort of twang in my speech. In a speech class at the University of Minnesota, I was advised again about the "twang" in my voice. So, perhaps it is true that the way we speak, dress, or act, perhaps even think, politically or socially, can provide a clue as to the area of the country that influenced our early life--like it or not. While I've tried to avoid it, slang can be another tell tale of origin. But, again we need to be reminded of what our forbears gave up, even in their speech--giving up their language to make a new start and a home in this country. To give up one's language cannot be easy, but it was not long after our great grandparents arrived in Wisconsin that their names became anglicized, and their speech and writing became more English than German.

One effort to keep our heritage alive in our family, begun by our mother in her young years, was to celebrate the birthdays of the three children born on the 4th of July--Evelyn born in 1910, and Jerome in 1919, and Juanita a year later in 1920. As an outgrowth of that birthday party, now perpetuated by Evelyn and Cyril, they make the effort to invite all children and grandchildren, all the extended family to get together to renew acquaintance and ties to each other. Particularly to the young children, it is a special fun day as Cy makes the effort to provide all of the fun things for the many children, and includes the patriotic celebration as well, with flags, parades, etc.