Czech Migration Patterns to Cleveland, 1865-1940

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Czech immigrants have been largely overlooked in the flood of immigration history monographs written in the last thirty years.[1] Yet the Czechs played an important role in the history of several U.S. cities and states. They were influential on the rural frontier in Nebraska, Texas, Minnesota, Iowa, and other Middle West states. In Chicago and Cleveland, they were among the largest ethnic groups by the early twentieth century. They were influential in the labor movement of both cities and represented important voting blocs as well.[2]

This article presents the outlines of Czech immigration to Cleveland. It explores Czech settlement patterns and social networks in Cleveland from 1965 to 1940. It also details the towns and villages from which Czech Clevelanders migrated.

Settlement Patterns and Social Networks

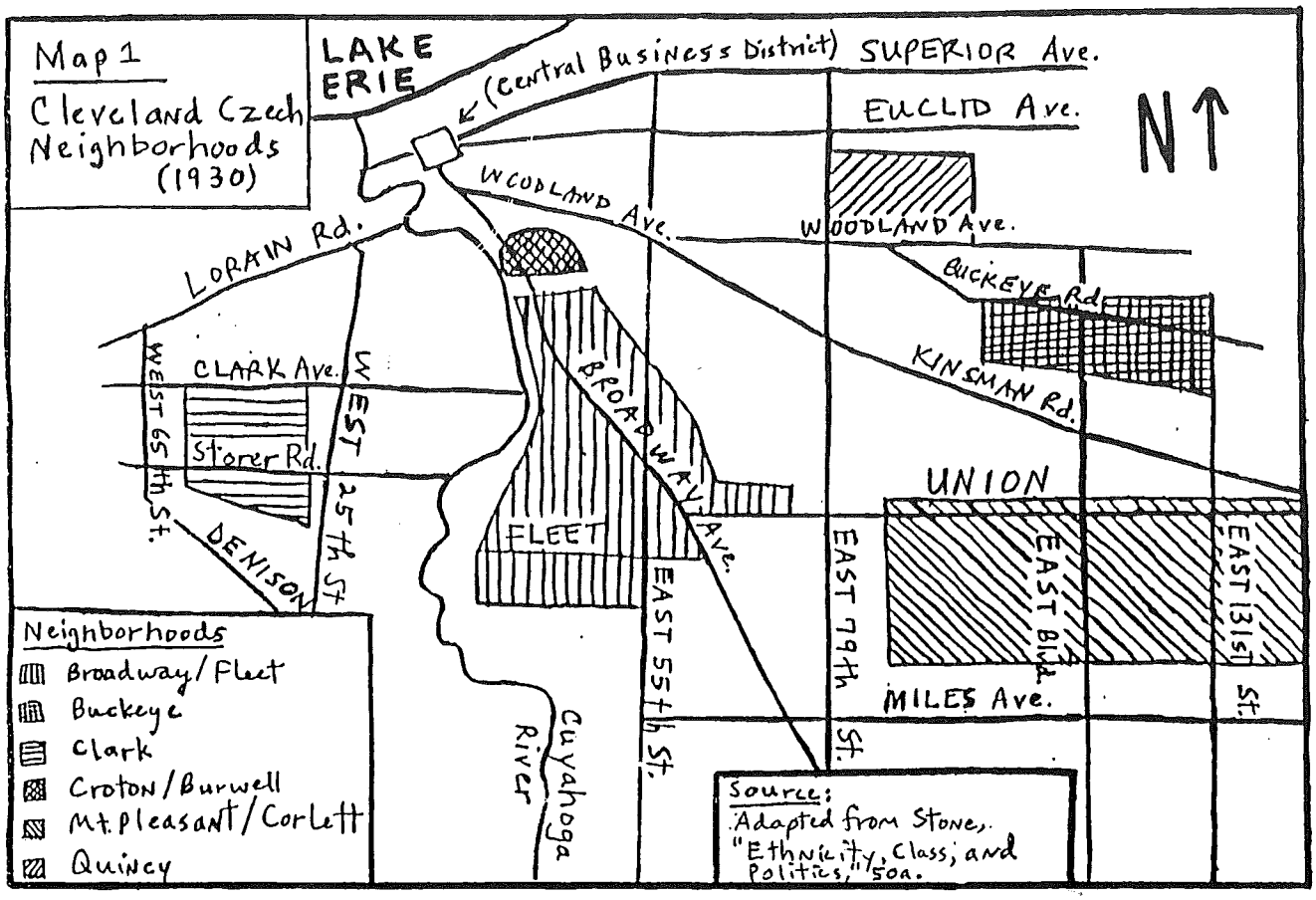
The Czech community that emerged in Cleveland in the last half of the nineteenth century was, together with those in Chicago and New York, one of the three largest urban Czech settlements in the United States. By 1910, Cleveland was the home of approximately 40,000 first and second generation Czech immigrants, living in six neighborhoods of the city.[3]

The first Czech neighborhood sprang up around Croton and Burwell Streets in the 1860s, to the southeast of the downtown Cleveland. By the 1870s, Czech neighborhoods also took shape in the Clark/Storer area on the west side of Cleveland and in the Broadway/Fleet area to the south of the original Croton/Burwell neighborhood. During the 1880s a fourth settlement came into being forty to fifty blocks to the east of Croton/Burwell along Quincy Avenue. Finally, beginning at the turn of the century, Czechs moving out of the Croton/Burwell, Broadway/Fleet, and Quincy neighborhoods, formed two new settlements on Cleveland's southeast side. The first and smaller community emerged along Buckeye Avenue, beyond a large Hungarian and Slovak neighborhood. The second and larger of the new neighborhoods appeared in the Mt. Pleasant/Corlett area. By the 1920s and 1930s, the latter had eclipsed the old Broadway/Fleet neighborhood, as the center of Czech immigrant community in Cleveland.[4]

As recent immigration historians have noted for other immigrant groups, Czech immigrants did not settle entirely in homogenous urban enclaves. Only in the Broadway/Fleet neighborhood did Czechs consist of 90% or more of the population. In the original Croton/Burwell settlement, Czechs settled among Germans and Central European Jews. In the west side Clark/Storer neighborhood, Czechs were outnumbered by Germans and small numbers of other nationalities until almost the turn of the century. The populations of both the Quincy and Buckeye neighborhoods were also mixed. In the Mt. Pleasant/Corlett area, the new Czech mecca of the 1920s and 1930s, Czechs were only one of three large ethnic groups in the neighborhood (the other two being Jews and Italians). Large number of Poles and various numbers of several other nationalities also resided in the area.[5]

Unlike most other European immigrant groups, Czechs came to the United States during both the "old" immigrant period from 1865 to 1890 and the "new" immigrant period from 1890 to 1914. Like many "old" immigrants, Czechs normally came intending to settle permanently in the United States, often in family groups. Return migration to Bohemia and Moravia was as low as 10%. In contrast, return migration rates for most East and South European immigrant groups was normally 33%, and sometimes even higher.[6]

Another similarity between Czechs and most "old" immigrants involved their occupational skills and choices. Coming before most new" immigrants, Czechs succeeded in acquiring land in the Great Plains and Prairie states. In addition, Czech immigrants to urban areas, like their German counterparts, included large numbers of skilled workers. In an 1869 census of Cleveland Czechs conducted by the nationally circulated Czech-language newspaper *Slavie*, around

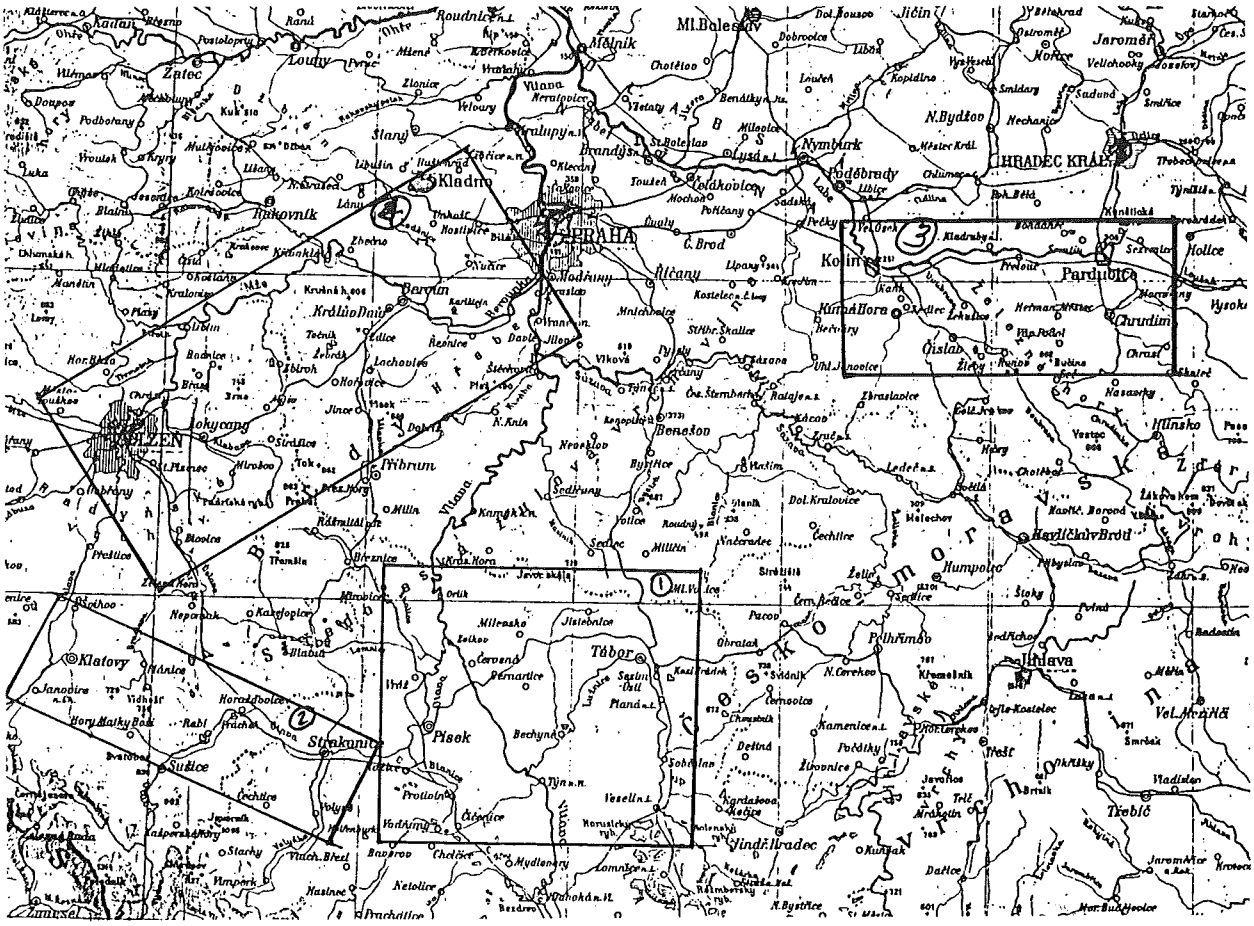


half of Czech male adults in the city were listed as skilled workers. Masons, carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, coopers, and machinists were the most common skilled occupations appearing in the census.[7] By the end of the century, large numbers of Cleveland Czechs also labored in a wide array of other skilled occupations. Czechs were particularly well presented as skilled metal workers (iron molders were the most numerous). Czech bakers were also conspicuous.[8]

Unskilled and semiskilled Czechs were also present in large numbers. John D. Rockefeller's vast Standard Oil works, located in a valley below the Croton/Burwell neighborhood, employed hundreds of early Czech immigrants to the city in the 1870s. Similarly, the Cleveland Rolling Mill Company hired numerous unskilled Czech strikebreakers during a major strike in 1882.[9]

To some extent, the ideological differences that emerged among Cleveland Czechs reflected the occupational divide between skilled and unskilled workers. As early as the 1860s, Cleveland Czechs split over the issue of religion. Rifts developed as local clergy attempted to stymie the growth of anticlerical Czech nationalist clubs. The latter criticized the Catholic church as a prime supporter of an Austro-Hungarian monarchy that refused to give political autonomy to Czechs in the homeland. A small number of influential intellectuals together with numerous artisans and skilled workers combined to lead the anticlericals (known in the community as Free Thinkers). Over time, the Free Thinkers did succeed in attracting a number of unskilled and semiskilled workers as members of their mutual aid societies, athletic, dramatic, and singing societies. However, many, and perhaps most unskilled and semiskilled Czech Clevelanders kept their allegiance to the Catholic church and remained outside the Free Thinking social orbit.[10]

After 1890, the immigration of large numbers of Czech Socialists furthers divided the community ideologically and socially. Although initially members of the Free Thinking organizations, many Czech Socialists decided by the first decade of the twentieth century that separate Socialist institutions were necessary. They focused their efforts at first upon creating a Czech Socialist newspaper and Socialist-oriented gymnastic societies to replace the Free Thinking Sokol gymnastic societies. Soon, they organized a series of consumer cooperatives, followed



in 1926 by the communal purchase of two neighboring farms in rural Ohio, southeast of Cleveland.[11]

As was true of the early Free Thinkers, skilled workers dominated the membership of the Czech Socialists. Occupational differences were evident between the two groups in the early twentieth century, nonetheless. For instance, a larger proportion of Free Thinkers were independent entrepreneurs than was the case for the Socialists.[12]

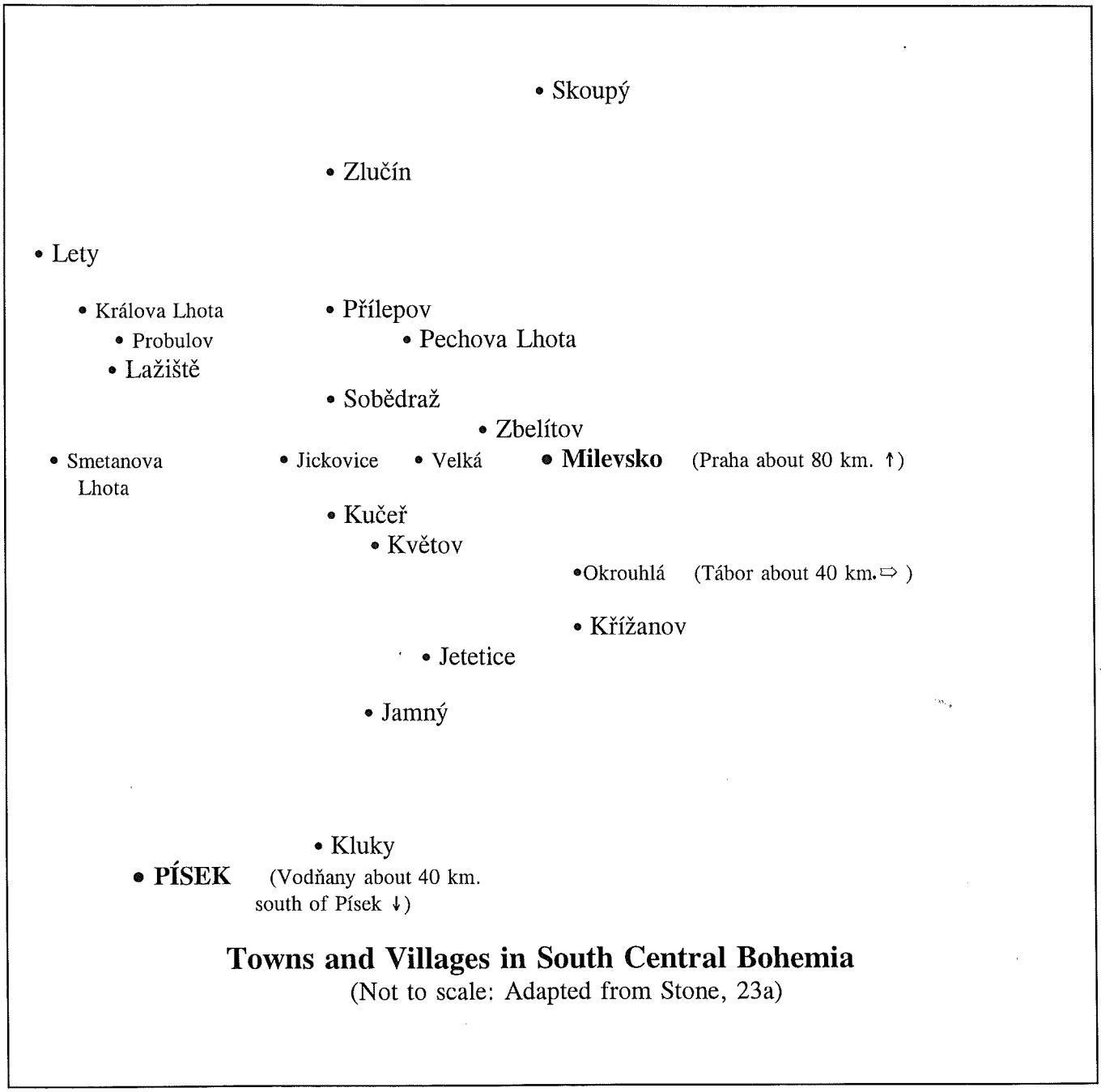
Despite creating some of their own institutions, the Socialists continued to cooperate with the Free Thinkers in the various Free Thinking mutual aid societies and in the Free Thinking "Sunday schools." Free Thinkers had designed the latter as an alternative to Catholic Sunday Schools. The Free Thinking schools taught evolution and other "rationalist" subjects.[13]

Although conflict erupted frequently in the Cleveland Czech community over ideological differences, it was not ubiquitous. Leaders of the three ideological factions did manage to unite behind efforts to create a Czechoslovak nation-state in the last 1910s. Moreover, cooperation was evident in certain strikes and political campaigns as well. On the whole, however, most Czechs aligned themselves with one of the three factions. Consequently, Czech Clevelanders remained divided in terms of their social affiliations well into the twentieth century.[14]

The ideological turmoil existing in the Czech community was by no means unique to Cleveland. Divisions in the Czech lands between supporters of the Old Czechs and the Young Czechs were similar to the clash between Catholics and Free Thinkers in Czech communities in the United States. Splits between Catholics and Free Thinkers emerged in almost all rural and urban Czech communities in the United States. Only in the urban or industrial areas, however, did Socialist Czechs make an impact.[15]

Towns and Villages of Origin

Cleveland Czechs migrated primarily from Bohemia. Although they migrated from a variety of areas, a large measure of chain migration was evident. The region of highest migration was from the districts of Tábor and Písek in southern Bohemia, particularly from the county of Milevsko. Perhaps as many as one-third of Cleveland Czechs hailed from this area. A second area of high migration centered around a band of industrial towns stretching from Plzeň northeast to



Towns and Villages in South Central Bohemia
(Not to scale: Adapted from Stone, 23a)

Beroun and Kladno. Other regions sending large numbers to Cleveland included southwest Bohemia around Klatovy and the area east of Praha around Časlav.[16]

Czechs from the three main ideological factions in Cleveland tended to come from different environments in Bohemia. Catholic Czechs came heavily from rural villages, especially those in southern Bohemia. Socialist Czechs normally came from industrial cities and towns (particularly those involved in iron or coal production) such as Plzeň, Strašice, Dobřív, Rokycany, and Kladno. Free Thinkers were the most heterogeneous in terms of towns of origin. Yet some trends still emerged. For instance, many Free Thinkers, particularly the earlier migrants, came from towns (rather than rural villages like the Catholics) which were less industrial in nature than those from which most of the Socialists migrated. Some prominent examples include Beroun, Vodňany, and Strakonice.[17]

Not only did Czech Clevelanders migrate from the same regions, but often from the same villages and

towns. For example, certain Czech villages emerge over and over in the baptismal and marriage records of St. Prokop, a Czech Catholic parish in the west side Clark/Storer neighborhood. Villages sending representatives from at least five different families include Pechova Lhota, Kluky, Těchnice, Probulov, Lažiště, Lety, and Králova Lhota, all in south central Bohemia.[18]

Chain migration was also evident among Catholics parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes in the Broadway/Fleet neighborhood and St. Wenceslaus in the Croton/Burwell neighborhood. For the latter, villages and towns sending representatives from five or more families include Beroun, Okrouhli, Kučeř, Kostelec, Vodňany, Zbelitov, and Jetětice. Records at Our Lady of Lourdes, to the south of St. Wenceslaus, yield an even larger number of towns and villages sending representatives from five or more families. Chain migration was evident from the villages of Jickovice, Jamný, Přílepov, Sobědraž, Okrouhli, Zahrádka, Březí, Kučeř, Smetanova Lhota, Zlucín, Krtel, Bor, Novosedly, Jetětice, Skoupí, Lhota, Volešno, Křižanov, Hajany, Pechova Lhota, Záhoří, Třesnic, Velká, Květov, and Zamlekov. Towns that appeared consistently in the records include Blatno, Netolice, Vodňany, Beroun, and Strašice.[19]

Many, and perhaps most, of those reporting commercial or industrial towns as their place of birth in the parish records either were already, or would soon become, associated with the Free Thinkers or the Socialists. For instance, several of the early members of Žižka Lodge 9 (on the west side) of the Česko-Slovenských Podporujících Spolků, one of the first Free Thinking mutual aid lodges in Cleveland, were from the town of Beroun, a town that emerges again and again in the baptismal and marriage records of all three Czech churches studied.[20]

Conclusion

Compared with other immigrant groups, Czechs remain largely unstudied. Further research is needed not only on Cleveland Czechs, but also on Czechs in the large communities that emerged in Chicago and New York. Beyond the three largest Czech urban enclaves, it is also important to examine the origins and behavior of Czechs in a wide array of urban and industrial settings in which small Czechs communities arose. These include cities such as St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Baltimore, as well as smaller industrial towns such as those in southeast Ohio, southwestern Pennsylvania, and other areas. Research on rural Czechs, although receiving more attention from Czech genealogists, could be augmented as well.

Undoubtedly, Czechs in other parts of the United States came from at least some of the same towns and villages as those in Cleveland. Given the great interest in Czech genealogy that has surfaced recently, it may soon be possible to make useful comparisons between Czechs who settled in varying parts of the United States.

NOTES

1. The best studied immigrant groups have been the Irish, the Germans, and particularly the Italians. A few notable studies on various Slavic groups have also emerged.
2. Scholarly articles concerning urban Czech immigrants include Josef Barton, "Religion and Cultural Change in Czech Immigrant Communities, 1850-1920," in Randall Miller and Thomas Marzik, eds., *Catholic Immigrants in Urban America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), 3-24; Henry Leonard, "Ethnic Cleavage and Industrial Conflict in Late Nineteenth Century America: The Cleveland Rolling Mill Company Strikes of 1882 and 1885," *Labor History*, Fall, Socialism in the Czech Community in Chicago, 1875-1887," in Dirk Hoerder, ed., *Struggle a Hard Battle: Essays on Working-Class Immigrants* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), 121-42.
3. Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, *Population*, Vol. IV, 548-50.
4. Czech neighborhood locations derived from Cleveland city directories, 1860-1940, as well as the 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, and 1920 United States federal manuscript censuses. See also Gregory M. Stone, "Ethnicity, Class, and Politics Among Czechs in Cleveland, 1870-1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1993), Chapter 3.
5. See *ibid* for the ethnic composition of Cleveland Czech neighborhoods.
6. "Old" immigrants refer to those coming between 1815 and 1890 from North and West Europe, particularly British, Irish, German, Swedish, and Norwegian immigrants. "New" immigrants were those coming between 1890 and 1914 from South and East Europe. For information concerning return migration rates for various immigrant groups see Thomas Archdeacon, *Becoming American* (New York: Free Press, 1983)
7. Thomas Čapek, *The Čechs in America*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 28, reprints the results of the *Slavie* census for Cleveland.
8. The 1900, 1910, and 1920 federal manuscript censuses for Cleveland reveal a wide variety of crafts employing Czech adult males by the early twentieth century.
9. See the 1880 federal manuscript census for Cleveland and Leonard, "Ethnic Cleavage."

10. See Stone, "Ethnicity, Class, and Politics Among Czechs in Cleveland, 1870-1940," Chapter 4, for an extended discussion of the class backgrounds of Catholics and Free Thinkers.
11. See the Frank Bardoun Papers at the Western Reserve Historical Society.
12. See Note 10 for the class backgrounds of Socialists and Free Thinkers.
13. See the Frank Bardoun Papers.
14. See Note 10 on the persistence of ideological conflict in the Cleveland Czech community.
15. See Čapek, *The Čechs in America*, and Schneirov, "Free Thought and Socialism."
16. Towns of origin for Free Thinkers and Socialists derived from naturalization records at the Cuyahoga County Archives. Those for Catholics were obtained from the baptismal and marriage records of three of the six Czech Catholic churches in Cleveland: Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Prokop, and St. Wenceslaus.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid*; for early membership of CSPS Žižka Lodge 9 see the Records of the Czechoslovak Society of America, at the Western Reserve Historical Society.

About the Author

Dr. Gregory M. Stone received his B.A. in History from Boston College, in 1982, his M.A. in History from Indiana University in 1984, and his Ph.D. in History from Rutgers University in 1993. After a year as a Visiting Instructor at Florida International University, Dr. Stone obtained his current position at Gulliver Preparatory School in Miami teaching Advanced Placement and Honors United States History. His doctoral dissertation focused upon Czech immigrant ideology, politics, and labor activity in Cleveland. Future research plans include probing further into the Cleveland Czech community as well as into several other urban Czech communities.