

David Robbins, thesis director

B.A. Thesis Evaluation

Jakub Skopek

Czech Immigrants in Minnesota; History and Critical Bibliography

This thesis explores the political, economic, social, and cultural forces motivating the emigration of Czechs from Bohemia to the United States between 1848 and the late nineteenth century. It examines how people learned about America and about the possibilities of traveling there, how the journey was made from Bohemia to the German ports of embarkation, and how the change in maritime technology enabled and impacted emigration from Europe to the U.S. On the other side of the Atlantic, the thesis considers general conditions and difficulties faced by new immigrants once they had landed on American soil, and particularly the experiences, methodologies, and patterns of settlement, cultural differentiation, and cultural integration of the Czech settlers in Minnesota.

In focusing on patterns of rural settlement and the lives of Czech settlers in rural areas, Mr. Skopek has chosen to explore a generally underrepresented area of study in immigration history, which frequently documents the experiences of urban immigrants of all nationalities, even if that urban experience was not typical for the majority of immigrants in a given ethnic group. He is to be commended for this boldness and insight, although the limited resources of existing printed sources makes his task more difficult, and the resulting conclusions perhaps somewhat less comprehensive and satisfactory than he might have liked.

Working mainly within the conventions of "thick description," Mr. Skopek often eschews theoretical framing in favor of confining himself primarily to presentation of material from primary source materials (or secondary source materials in which primary source material is embedded) from the immediate period and events under investigation that address, as much as is feasible, the particular and even unique circumstances surrounding the "events" in question.

The problems that he encountered with sources (and sometimes with lack or inadequacy of them) in attempting to take the path less travelled are admirably outlined in his critical bibliography of sources on Czech immigration generally and on Czech immigration to Minnesota in particular. Mr. Skopek has clearly initiated a line of research (which, he explains, he plans to continue in future academic work) with eyes wide open to the occasional (or sometimes more than occasional) shortcomings of his sources, and he candidly and critically outlines for the reader (or future researcher) where more work is needed.

The thesis itself is well written, in clear English of appropriate tone and diction. It is lighter on theory than some members of the department (perhaps even all, including me) might be comfortable with, but it is a good job of historical assemblage and reportage. Mr. Skopek has collected and presented his historical information well, and he has

demonstrated (both in the text and in the critical bibliography) a good working knowledge of his sources, their strengths and their weaknesses.

As Mr. Skopek moves beyond the bachelor's level in his study, I have no doubt that his knowledge and development of his theoretical apparatus will evolve appropriately to include additional elements of emigration/immigration, cultural assimilation, communitarian, and post-colonialist theory, as well as other interpretative approaches. For a bachelor's thesis, however, I believe that what Mr. Skopek has accomplished is creditable, commendable, and promisingly suggestive for further consideration.

Thesis evaluation: "2, velmi dobre"

Signed:

Prof. David L. Robbins, Ph.D.

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at [drobbins@suffolk.edu](mailto:d Robbins@suffolk.edu).