

History of the
Moravian (Czech) Cemetery

c. 1985

The author of this document is unknown, although it may have been Nettie Crenshaw, who was the historian of the Moravian (Czech) Cemetery Association for many years.

Editor

The Moravian (Czech) Cemetery is located in the Steep Hollow community, about 3 or 4 miles east of Bryan, Texas, in Brazos County. The cemetery is part of a League of Land granted by the Mexican Government to J. W. Scott by instrument dated November 23, 1832, filed for record on January 5, 1853.¹ Scott, by Deed dated March 26, 1873,² conveyed the western one-half of such League to Mary C. Goodwin. Goodwin, by Deed dated March 29, 1873,³ conveyed same to M. W. McGraw, B. H. Davis, T. J. Beall and Harvey Mitchell.

The said McGraw, et al., conveyed several other tracts out of this western half of the Scott League and then, by Deed dated April 13, 1875,⁴ B. H. Davis and T. J. Beall conveyed their remaining interest to M. W. McGraw. McGraw conveyed an undivided 1/6 interest of same to W. B. Forman by Deed dated July 27, 1877.⁵

The remaining undivided interest owned by Harvey Mitchell apparently became subject to a bankruptcy proceeding in the United States District Court for the Western District of Texas. There is a deed dated April 29, 1876,⁶ from David McIntosh to James H. Batte. It is recited therein that such sale is being made pursuant to an Order entered in such court and that such undivided interest, along with other land, was therefore thereby conveyed. Batte, by Deed dated

- 1 Vol. D, Page 181, Deed Records, Brazos County, Texas
- 2 Vol. N, Page 385, Deed Records, Brazos County, Texas
- 3 Vol. N, Page 387, Deed Records, Brazos County, Texas
- 4 Vol. P, Page 495, Deed Records, Brazos County, Texas
- 5 Vol. R, Page 286, Deed Records, Brazos County, Texas
- 6 Vol. Q, Page 465, Deed Records, Brazos County, Texas

July 29, 1876,⁷ sold same to the above-mentioned W. B. Forman.

Then the said M. W. McGraw and W. B. Forman joined in a Deed dated November 6, 1880,⁸ to convey a 124-acre tract to Josef Stasta (sic).

Out of such 124-acre tract, Josef Stasta on December 23, 1889,⁹ conveyed 1 acre to Joseph Mekeska, as President of the Moravian Brothers Burial Ground. As specified in the Deed, this land was to be used exclusively for a Moravian graveyard. Thereafter, the Deed Records reflect nothing whatsoever with respect to this tract, or the apparent owner thereof. It is not known who succeeded Joseph Mekeska as President of the Moravian Brothers Burial Ground.

In later years the care of the cemetery was assumed by A. B. Syptak who was County Clerk of Brazos County from 1940 to 1966. His father-in-law, Josef Nedbalek, and infant Siptak (sic) cousins are buried in this cemetery.

After A. B. Syptak died, the care and maintenance of the cemetery was assumed by Dr. Charles L. Novosad, a practicing physician of geriatrics and general medicine, of Pojoaque, New Mexico. Dr. Novosad's great grandfather is buried in this cemetery.

In February of 1983, Dr. Novosad called a meeting of some of the descendants of those who are buried in this cemetery for the purpose of

7 . Vol. Q, Page 464, Deed Records, Brazos County, Texas

8 Vol. 7, Page 16, Deed Records, Brazos County, Texas

9 Vol. 7, Page 40, Deed Records, Brazos County, Texas

continuing the care of this historically old cemetery. At this meeting he presented a proposed Constitution and By-Laws for the formation of a Moravian (Czech) Cemetery Association. The purpose of this organization was to include the maintenance of the cemetery, historical preservation and consideration for declaring this a State Historical Cemetery. At this meeting, the Constitution and By-Laws were adopted and officers, Board Directors, legal counsel and consultants were elected.

On March 28, 1983, the Moravian (Czech) Cemetery Association received from the Secretary of State, State of Texas, the Certificate of Incorporation of Moravian (Czech) Cemetery of Steep Hollow, Texas, Charter Number 648907.

During the time A. B. Syptak was caring for the cemetery, a chain link fence was erected around .15 acres of the one-acre tract. In 1985, the Moravian (Czech) Cemetery Association had the tract resurveyed and a chain link fence built to include the entire one acre.

At the present time, access to the cemetery is through the remainder of the original 124-acre tract, which is currently owned by H. P. Dansby, Jr. The Moravian (Czech) Cemetery Association is currently attempting to establish a right-of-way to the cemetery.

There are 15 graves with 11 markers. One of the markers includes graves for 4. This marker apparently was placed much later than the time of the deaths. It is of more modern design, and it is not inscribed in Czech. All of the other markers in the cemetery are inscribed in

Czech, and in most instances indicate the place of birth, all being towns in Moravia.

It is believed that there are as many as 41 graves here, but these records are not currently available.

The marker showing the earliest date of death is Marie Siptak (sic), who was born January 19, 1885, and died February 16, 1885. The latest burial in the cemetery was Frank Steasta (sic), who died November 20, 1906.

Many of the descendants of those buried in this cemetery live in this area and also other parts of the United States. The occupations of these descendants include educators, doctors, builders, ranchers and city and county government officials.