

May 17, 1990

## THE SHILOH COMMUNITY

In the mid 1800s several immigrant families from Central Europe started the community of Shiloh. Most of these families came from Czechoslovakia but some came from Poland and Germany. They came together to form the community approximately two miles south of the campus of Texas A&M University.<sup>1</sup> Using today's landmarks as a reference, Shiloh was located between Carter Creek to the East, FM 2818 in the South, Wellborn Road in the West and George Bush Drive to the North.<sup>2</sup> The lands of the community of Shiloh were absorbed by the City of College Station and it no longer exists, but its heritage remains.

The community of Shiloh, which was named after the Biblical city, consisted of several large family farms.<sup>3</sup> One of these farms was the Frank Stasney farm which covered 560 acres and formed what was the Southeast corner of the community.<sup>4</sup> It contained land starting at the corner of Southwest Parkway and Texas Avenue and continued out to the edge of the community.

Other families that made up the Shiloh community were the Kapchinskies, who had a farm located north of the Stasney farm; the Boriskies had a farm west of the Stasney farm, and the Hrdlickas, who had a farm on the far west edge of the community.

Life on these farms was difficult, but the families worked together to survive. These families lived close together and provided support for each other. All the farms generally had the same agricultural interests but not necessarily the same language. The families were from different countries and did not speak the same language, but that did not weaken their desire to work together. The children even played together even though they did not share the same language. Czech children played with Polish children, and each spoke their respective languages, but they still played happily.<sup>6</sup>

Basically the family farms were self sufficient, which was a must for the time period they existed. The families raised cattle, hogs, and chickens for the meat, eggs, and milk they produced. They also grew fruits and vegetables for their own use and to sell to merchants in Bryan and to the A&M College.<sup>7</sup> The trip to the college and to Bryan was not as easy as it is today. The trip to Bryan to buy and sell goods would take the whole day by wagon.<sup>8</sup> Frank Stasney took a step that made the trip easier for some families.

Initially families had to travel past the campus and then go west to Wellborn Road (Old State Highway 6). They then took Wellborn Road into Bryan. Frank Stasney let other families located south of his farm cut a lane across his property so they could reach the main

road more quickly.<sup>9</sup> Without this lane they would have to go around his farm to the south. This is an example of how families gave of themselves to help their neighbors. This road is still in use today and is named Krenek Tap Road.

The families would also share supplies. In the summer when it was too hot to store meat for long periods of time, the families would get together and butcher one animal. They would then split the meat among themselves.<sup>10</sup> This was enough meat to last throughout the week. Preservation of food was always a problem, especially in the summer.

Fruits and vegetables could be canned and placed in the cellars to keep cool. Food that was used during the week that could not be canned had to be kept cool with ice. Families would dig a hole in the ground and put a block of ice in it. The food would then be placed on top of the ice and the hole would be covered with a cloth.<sup>11</sup> This formed a primitive type of refrigerator.

Living conditions were also not as they are today. The Shiloh community did not get electricity until the 1930's.<sup>12</sup> They used wood stoves and kerosene lamps for heat and light. The Stasneys lived in a two story house with the dining and kitchen areas separated from the living quarters.<sup>13</sup> This was done in case a fire started in the kitchen area so that the whole house would not burn. The children lived in a cabin next door.<sup>14</sup> During the summer the heat would be so bad the families would sleep on the porches that had been splashed with water to keep cool.<sup>15</sup>

Some members of the community did other things besides farming to supplement their living. Frank Stasney had a vineyard and a mill and his family was provided with homemade molasses and wine.<sup>16</sup> He also had a blacksmith shop where he repaired his tools and those of his neighbors. The farmers used basic farming tools which wore down quickly. Farming with these basic tools was very hard on the farmers. In order to purchase more modern equipment, which was frequently too expensive for individuals to buy, some members of the community formed a group to purchase these tools.

The farmers formed the Slavonic Agricultural and Benevolent Society in 1883.<sup>17</sup> The members pooled their money and bought tools as a group and all the members were able to use them. There was a \$1.20 membership fee and dues were ten cents a month.<sup>18</sup> The members also helped each other with other farm work such as the harvesting of crops and the building of barns. The club eventually evolved from an agricultural club to a social club that is still in existence today.<sup>19</sup> The club was originally built on Frank Stasney's farm, but it burned down.<sup>20</sup> The club was rebuilt across the street on two acres of land owned by John Stasney, Frank's younger brother. It was located on the spot where Fort Shiloh Restaurant is today. The restaurant is built with portions of the original Shiloh Community Center.<sup>21</sup> This land was then sold to Henry T. Schovajsa, then president of the Shiloh Club,



and Frank Barak, the secretary of the club on September 28, 1931.<sup>22</sup> The land was later transferred to Charles E. Arnold, a trustee of the club, on July 18, 1974.<sup>23</sup> It was sold to the current owner, Ken Martin, on March 24, 1976.<sup>24</sup>

The club house functioned as the Shiloh Community Center, and it was used for entertainment purposes. There was not much entertainment at that time so the community held dances at the center. Several members of the Stasney family played instruments.<sup>25</sup> Mrs. Richard Patrick, granddaughter of Frank Stasney, remembers her grandfather and her great uncle John playing in the band at dances held at the center. She remembers dancing there as a four year old child.

The club is still in existence although it has changed its name to the Shiloh Club. It is now purely a social club, and its membership of about fifty families participate in monthly dinners and dances.<sup>26</sup> It is an opportunity for the members to meet to play dominoes and visit. That the youngest member of the club is thirty-four is evidence that most of the members are older families.<sup>27</sup> There was once a requirement that to be a member you must come from Bohemian descent, but that requirement no longer applies.<sup>28</sup> The club also does some community service activities. Each year for Christmas the club "adopts" a needy family and feeds them dinner and buys presents for the children.<sup>29</sup>

The community also had its own two room school at the turn of the century. It was originally located on the Frank Stasney farm but was later moved to the corner of FM 2818 and present Texas Avenue.<sup>30</sup> Classes were taught for grades one through eight by John Stasney, who was a member of the Texas A&M class of 1896.<sup>31</sup> The building was used until 1920 when the Shiloh school joined the newly formed A&M College Consolidated Rural School.<sup>32</sup> It was eventually absorbed into the A&M Consolidated Independent School District in 1928.<sup>33</sup>

A part of the Shiloh community still exists. The College Station Cemetery includes the original Shiloh Cemetery. This original cemetery is for members of Shiloh's original families only. The land for the cemetery was given to the Methodist Church in 1870 by Mrs. William G. Rector.<sup>34</sup> The Shiloh Club took care of the cemetery until the city took it over. When the city acquired the Shiloh Cemetery it also acquired land around it to expand the cemetery for use as the College Station Cemetery. The College Station Cemetery was officially dedicated by the city on February 1, 1948.<sup>35</sup>

Narrative by Keith Beyer

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Deborah Lynn Parks. History of the City of College Station, 1938-1982. Graduate thesis for Texas A&M University, May 1984. p. 36.
- <sup>2</sup> Taped Interview with Mrs. Richard L. Patrick by Keith Beyer, private tapes on Shiloh Community, February 16, 1990.
- <sup>3</sup> Deborah Lynn Parks, page 37.
- <sup>4</sup> Patrick Interview.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Deborah Lynn Parks, page 38.
- <sup>7</sup> Patrick Interview.
- <sup>8</sup> Deborah Lynn Parks, page 38.
- <sup>9</sup> Patrick Interview.
- <sup>10</sup> Deborah Lynn Parks, page 40.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, page 39.
- <sup>13</sup> Patrick Interview.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Deborah Lynn Parks, page 39.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, page 38.
- <sup>17</sup> Written Interview, March 16, 1990, with Mr. Tom Johnson by Keith Beyer. Private transcript on Shiloh Community Center.
- <sup>18</sup> Deborah Lynn Parks, page 39.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, page 39.
- <sup>20</sup> Patrick Interview.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Brazos County Deed. Volume 80, page 593.
- <sup>23</sup> Brazos County Deed. Volume 329, page 666.
- <sup>24</sup> Brazos County Deed. Volume 350, page 257.
- <sup>25</sup> Patrick Interview.
- <sup>26</sup> Johnson Interview.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick Interview.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> A&M College Consolidated Rural School Historical Marker Application. Lucy M. Garcia and Margaret R. Donaldson.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Deborah Lynn Parks, page 42.

<sup>35</sup> Brazos County History, Rich Past-Bright Future. Bryan, The Brazos County Heritage and History Council, 1986, page 36.