NORTH BROADWAY: FROM A NEW ENGLAND FARMING COMMUNITY
TO A BOHEMIAN-URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

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The North Broadway area of Cleveland for the purpose of this paper is bordered by Kingsbury Run on the north; Morgan Run on the south; the Cuyahoga River on the west; and on the east (which is less clearly defined) East 55th Street to the old Erie Railroad tracks and East 65th Street from these tracks to Union Avenue. The center of this community over the years has been East 55th Street and Broadway Avenue. North Broadway, annexed by the City of Cleveland in 1867 and 1872, was in the fourteenth and later the twenty-fourth ward until the first decade of the 20th century. The area is located two miles south of Cleveland’s Public Square.

Originally North Broadway was a part of the northern region of Newburgh Township which was organized on October 15, 1814. The first pioneers bought land from agents of the Connecticut Land Company and settled along a dirt trail that became known as the Cleveland-Pittsburgh Road. (In 1834 the road was widened in Cleveland and soon became known as "Broadway.") In this early period, most of these settlers were from New England, while later in the 1840s, they began to come in greater numbers from other locations. The first pioneer was Ezekial Holly (Hawley) who arrived from Vermont in 1799 and purchased land along the south side of Kingsbury Run. During the next 40 years, a farming community was established as more families arrived from the East. Many of these early settlers would later have roads named after them, reflecting where their farms were located in North Broadway: New England was represented by Morgan, Cable, Gallup, Fowler, Jewett and Dolloff; New York and New Jersey by Petrie (East 49th Street) and Dille; England by Barkwill and Douse.

The decade of the 1820s saw the opening of the Ohio and Erie Canal which eventually made Cleveland the most important lake port in northern Ohio. North Broadway’s farming community grew and prospered as a part of the hinterland, especially since the canal was located along its western border in the Cuyahoga Valley. During the ten years before the canal was opened, stagecoaches were driven on Broadway, which soon became a plank road and an early turnpike. Inns were built along Broadway, accommodating the stagecoach passengers; Wightman Tavern, owned by a settler from Groton, Connecticut, was situated across the road from an early schoolhouse, the site today of St. Alexis Hospital. The Cody House, operated by Joseph A. Cody (the uncle of "Buffalo Bill" Cody), was located on Broadway near Union Road. Sherman’s Tavern, maintained by a settler from Vermont, was built on a lot where today Broadway crosses East 55th Street.

In the years before the Civil War, North Broadway was a sparsely populated, truck farming region between Cleveland and Newburgh, a small town a few miles to the south. It never had a New England town square like the two communities on either end of Broadway because governmental and commercial affairs were conducted outside of the area. In religious matters, the residents, who were all Protestant, attended the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in Cleveland, as well as the Disciples of Christ Church in Newburgh.
North Broadway farmers played a major role in the establishment of the Disciples Church, a product of the Second Great Awakening, that was built in 1842 near the Newburgh town square and was later known as the Miles Avenue Church of Christ. John Wightman, innkeeper and farmer, had hosted a revival in 1835 when Alexander Campell, a founder of the denomination, preached to a large crowd that included Caleb and Youngs Morgan, two brothers who later became members of the new church. In the latter part of the 1850s, a young James A. Garfield preached against slavery at the Newburgh Church. At the time he was an instructor and the principal at the Western Reserve Eclectic Institute in Hiram. He became good friends with the Morgans, often staying overnight at their farmhouses when he was preaching.

Garfield became Lt. Colonel of the Forty-Second Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment when it was organized in September of 1861. Company G of the regiment was recruited by him during a ball held in the Newburgh town hall. (One of these recruits was a member of the Morgan family and was later killed during the siege of Vicksburg in 1863.) The first to enlist was Charles Jewett, who was made captain of a company that included young men from the Disciples Church. His uncle, A. A. Jewett, a resident of North Broadway and a trustee of Newburgh Township, was head of the Cuyahoga County Agriculture Society. In that position he had turned the county fairgrounds over to the state for use as a military camp on April 18, 1861. Named Camp Taylor, it was located at Kinsman Road and Forest Street (East 37th Street), which was about a mile across Kingsbury Run from North Broadway. The Seventh Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment, a unit that Garfield had originally wanted to lead, was organized at the camp with many recruits from Newburgh Township. Among the war’s dead were two neighbors of A. A. Jewett, Thomas Douse and Alfred Austin, both members of Company A, who died at the Battle of Ringgold, Georgia in 1863.

Industrial development increased dramatically during the Civil War and the post war period. A blast furnace was built in 1861 along the Cleveland-Pittsburgh Railroad near Jones Road and Broadway. The company was organized into the Cleveland Rolling Mill two years later and would become the American Steel and Wire Company in 1899. Welsh, Irish and Scotch workers, employed by the mill, lived close to their work, south of the North Broadway area. Czech and Polish immigrants soon joined the work force as production during the war years increased the demand for labor. Before moving closer to this employment, they commuted from their homes on Croton Street in Cleveland.

In the valley of Kingsbury Run, John D. Rockefeller and Samuel Andrews in 1865 began to consolidate the small oil refineries of the region into their Cleveland No. 1 Works located on Broadway near Independence Road. Eugene Grasselli built a chemical plant in 1866 across Broadway from the refineries that purchased his sulfuric acid. The Grasselli Chemical Company expanded into large scale production as Standard Oil, founded in 1870, grew during the next decades. Further down Broadway near Union Road, the Turner Worsted Mill (Cleveland Worsted Mill Company) was founded in 1870 and soon became a major producer of woolen cloth. About the same time, brickyards were opened close to the Ohio and Erie Canal near Petrie Road.

In the late 1850s, the Cuyahoga County Fair found a home for a few years on Broadway and Willson Avenue (East 55th Street). The fairgrounds, now on land leased from Caleb Morgan, had followed the retreating countryside around Cleveland. In a way, it symbolized the passing of North Broadway from a rural to an urban community.
The first Czech community in Cleveland was located along Croton Street across Kingsbury Run from North Broadway. The failure of the Revolution of 1848 in Bohemia, then a part of Austria-Hungary, resulted in the first Czech immigrants coming to Cleveland. Later, immigration would be based more on economic rather than political reasons. During the 1860s the Czechs began to establish a new community in North Broadway in order to be closer to their places of employment. They were joined by immigrants from Germany, who represented the largest foreign born population in Cleveland at the time. (Many Czechs were able to speak German because they had lived in close proximity in Europe.) The census records for Cleveland indicate a growth of the Czech population from 3,252 in 1870 to 17,747 in 1890. Like the Germans, many of the men were skilled workers with trades that included cooper, carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths and masons.

A map of North Broadway today includes a Huss and Praha (Prague) Street in addition to a Hamm Avenue. The German population by the 1890s was nearly as large as the Czech in North Broadway but this percentage soon began to decrease. Besides Hamm Avenue, named after a city in Germany, St. Alexis Hospital and St. John’s Evangelical and Reformed Church survive from the 1880s when both were founded by Germans.

North Broadway developed into Cleveland’s biggest Czech community and one of the largest Czechoslovakian communities in the nation when the Slovaks, cultural cousins of the Czechs, moved into the area at the turn of the century. The farms along Broadway were subdivided into lots and sold by the original settlers, some of whom were now real estate agents like A. A. Jewett, Jabesh Dolloff and Charles Barkwill. Workmen’s cottages were constructed on small lots that occasionally had another house built in the rear of the property. Owning a home was a very important value to these thrifty immigrants; as a result, Czech savings and loans associations were founded to help realize this goal.

Broadway was soon lined with numerous stores primarily owned by Czechs. Among the businesses were a disproportionate number of saloons that characterized the Czech "hospoda" back in Bohemia. The Old World institution was a place where family and friends gathered to talk, eat and dance while they drank their glasses of beer. The Forest City Brewery, located on Union Avenue near Broadway, was a Czech business that produced a light Pilsener beer for the immigrant community.

Czech immigrants in the United States were divided into two different camps: Roman Catholic (Conservative) and Progressive (Freethinker). The first group followed the traditional beliefs of Bohemia while the second rejected the Church and its tenets. Cleveland’s Czech population was split about evenly in half over these spiritual and social issues. Towards the end of the 1890s, increased immigration from rural Bohemia and Moravia along with a more established ethnic church in Cleveland, resulted in the eventual victory in numbers of the Catholics over the Progressives.

Reverend Anton Krasy, the first Czech priest to settle in the city, helped to found in 1862 St. Joseph’s Catholic Church on Woodland Avenue. He served mostly Germans in the parish, but also a growing number of Czechs from the Croton Street settlement. Bishop Amadeus Rappe appointed him five years later to be the pastor of the first Czech parish in Cleveland, St. Wenceslas (St. Vaclav) at the corner of Burwell Street and Arch Place. As a result of the movement of the congregation to North Broadway, the parish relocated in 1886 to the corner of Forest Street (East 37th Street) and Broadway, an area the Czechs called "Na Vrsku" (on the
hill). Our Lady of Lourdes, the third Czech parish in the city, was built in 1883 at the corner of Hamm Avenue and Randolph Street (East 55th Street). Reverend Stephen Furdek, who was born in Slovakia, administered to the Catholics in a neighborhood called "Zizkov," named after a section of Prague where some of the Czechs once lived. A brick Gothic church building replaced a frame one at the turn of the century to house what soon became the largest Czechoslovakian parish in the city.

The Czechs experienced a different type of Catholicism in America, and as a result, the drift to Freethinking was reduced. The social barrier between the congregation and the priest did not exist since both layman and cleric had to work together in managing the parish finances. The duties of the priest were not limited to ritual but included social and cultural responsibilities. The Catholic hierarchy was less remote since these dignitaries were former parish priests instead of members of an Old World aristocracy.5

Private schools were established in North Broadway by both the Catholic Church and the Progressives. St. Wenceslas and Our Lady of Lourdes conducted parochial schools because the Church saw the need to teach traditional spiritual and social values in addition to providing an environment more sympathetic to the needs of immigrant children. Whereas the parish school replaced public education, the Progressive school was supplemental to the three public schools of North Broadway: Warren, Fowler and Barkwill. The Bohemian Freethinkers School, operating in Bohemian National Hall, taught students in the Czech language. Subjects ranged from Czech literature and history to home economics and mechanical arts.

While the Czech Catholics were establishing their churches in the ethnic community, Protestant denominations saw the Progressives and other non-believers as fertile ground for missionary work and possible conversion. Protestantism never would be a major force in the Czech community when compared to the Catholics and the Progressives. Less than two percent of the Czechs in 1900 worshipped in Protestant churches because their conversion was more difficult than the Catholic effort to bring former members back into their old church. The Progressives, on the other hand, usually rejected all institutionalized religion.

Broadway Methodist Episcopal Church, founded in September of 1872, was the first Protestant church in North Broadway. Originally called the Broadway Union Mission Sunday School, it occupied a small frame house on Trumbull Street and Warren Place. Since many of the trustees were also members and officers of the First Methodist Church of Cleveland, Broadway M.E. has come to be viewed as a suburban church of the older institution. When a new church was built a few years later, the land on Broadway near Gallup Street was donated by three of North Broadway’s early New England settlers: Jonas Stafford, Alphonso Holly and Jabesh Gallup.

Broadway M.E. created a Bohemian Department in 1890 with its own associate minister who also took charge of the door-to-door missionary work of the church. Under the leadership of ministers like Reverend Frank Tauchen, Matthew Huta and James Louzechy, as well as the work of Oliver Mead Stafford, church board chairman, the congregation increased dramatically. Besides the church’s role of providing spiritual guidance, numerous programs were conducted: Americanization, athletics, music, drama, home economics and welfare services. The Rockefeller Foundation, after a study of churches in the 1920s, concluded that Broadway M.E. was "the" outstanding bilingual church in the nation.6 Today the church, St. Andrew Cooperative Parish, serves an English and Korean-speaking congregation at 5246 Broadway.

Down the street from Broadway M.E., a church was erected to specifically administer to the Czechs. Bethlehem Congregational Church of the Brethren, named after the John Hus church
in Prague, was founded in 1883 by Reverend Henry A. Schaufller. Three years later, the Schaufller College of Religion and Social Work was organized with the Bethlehem Church as its chapel. Both occupied land at the corner of Broadway and Fowler Avenue. In addition to Czechs, other nationalities attended the church and Sunday school. One was an English, Scotch-Irish boy named Ernest King, who later would become the famous Admiral King of World War II.

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The extent of prejudice against the Czechs was probably minimal in North Broadway since they moved into an area that was rural and relatively empty of people. A majority of the original residents, after selling most of their farmland, remained in the neighborhood. Many of them actively supported Protestant churches that administered to the Czech immigrants. Joseph A. Cody, president of the Republican Club in the fourteenth ward, welcomed Czechs into his party, especially during the Hayes-Tilden election campaign of 1876. The Sons of Temperance, however, who met in Jewett Hall on Broadway, were not particularly fond of the intemperate Czechs. Some prejudice was also evident among those who tried to proselytize the Czechs and other Slavic immigrants. When Leon Czolgosz assassinated President McKinley in 1901, a missionary from Schaufller College, who had once been at Czolgosz's house in a neighborhood south of North Broadway, wrote that Catholic Slavs were ignorant, superstitious, and poor citizens. Czech workers, who had been hired as strike breakers at the Cleveland Rolling Mill in 1882, also aroused animosity among the non-Slavic strikers, but most of them did not live in North Broadway.

The Czechs became active in the labor union movement when they were acculturated to their place in urban-industrial America. Some of the radical Progressives turned to socialism, supporting Eugene Debs for President. Joseph Martinek, a resident of North Broadway, was the editor of the American Workman's News (Americké Delnicke Listy), the voice of the Czech branch of the Socialist Party in the United States. Vaclav Snajdr, a less radical Progressive, published the Star of the New Era (Dennice Novekeku) from his office on Broadway. He often featured the ideas of Ladimir Klacel who called for a society based on love, beauty and harmony that would be ruled by the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Catering to his readers, however, Snajdr had to be less utopian, and his efforts were usually spent criticizing the policies of the Catholic Church. Another foreign language newspaper published on Broadway was the American, whose readers were normally conservative Catholics. Frank Svoboda, publisher of the newspaper, later became a state senator.

The Czech Progressives did not have a church, but they did have what a critic called "a beautiful infidel temple, Bohemian National Hall (Ceske Narodni Sine). Located at the corner of Broadway and Mead Avenue, the hall was dedicated in 1897 and is still used today by the Czech Sokols. The four-story brick building became the social and cultural center of the Progressives with its theatre and meeting rooms that housed a variety of activities. Over the years, prominent Czechs have used the hall's facilities: Thomas G. Masaryk, later the first president of Czechoslovakia, gave a series of lectures there in 1902 while Rudolph Friml, composer of light opera, used the hall a decade before he was to become famous in New York.

Bohemian National Hall was also utilized by the Czech benevolent societies. The original purpose of these associations was to provide a certain amount of financial security for their members. In addition, these groups were places to socialize and soon became forums for political activities. The leaders of these societies were often selected by the local political boss to be a party's candidate in local elections.
Political control in North Broadway was a reality by the 1880s when Czechs were elected to city council. If political strength is a good measurement of ascendance, the transition of the area was mostly completed by 1890. North Broadway had taken less than 30 years to evolve from a rural New England community to an urban one that was seen as a "city in Bohemia."  

FOOTNOTES


3 Eleanor E. Ledbetter, *The Czechs of Cleveland* (Cleveland: Americanization Committee, 1919), 36.

4 Ibid., 19.


6 *The Southeast Today* (Cleveland), 11 November 1980, 2.

7 *Annals of Cleveland, Cleveland Newspaper Digest for the Year 1876* (Cleveland: WPA, 1937), 643.


9 Chada, 88-91.

10 Ibid., 12.

11 *The Southeast Today* (Cleveland), 6 May 1980, 2.

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