



Artwork: Kytka Hilmarova.

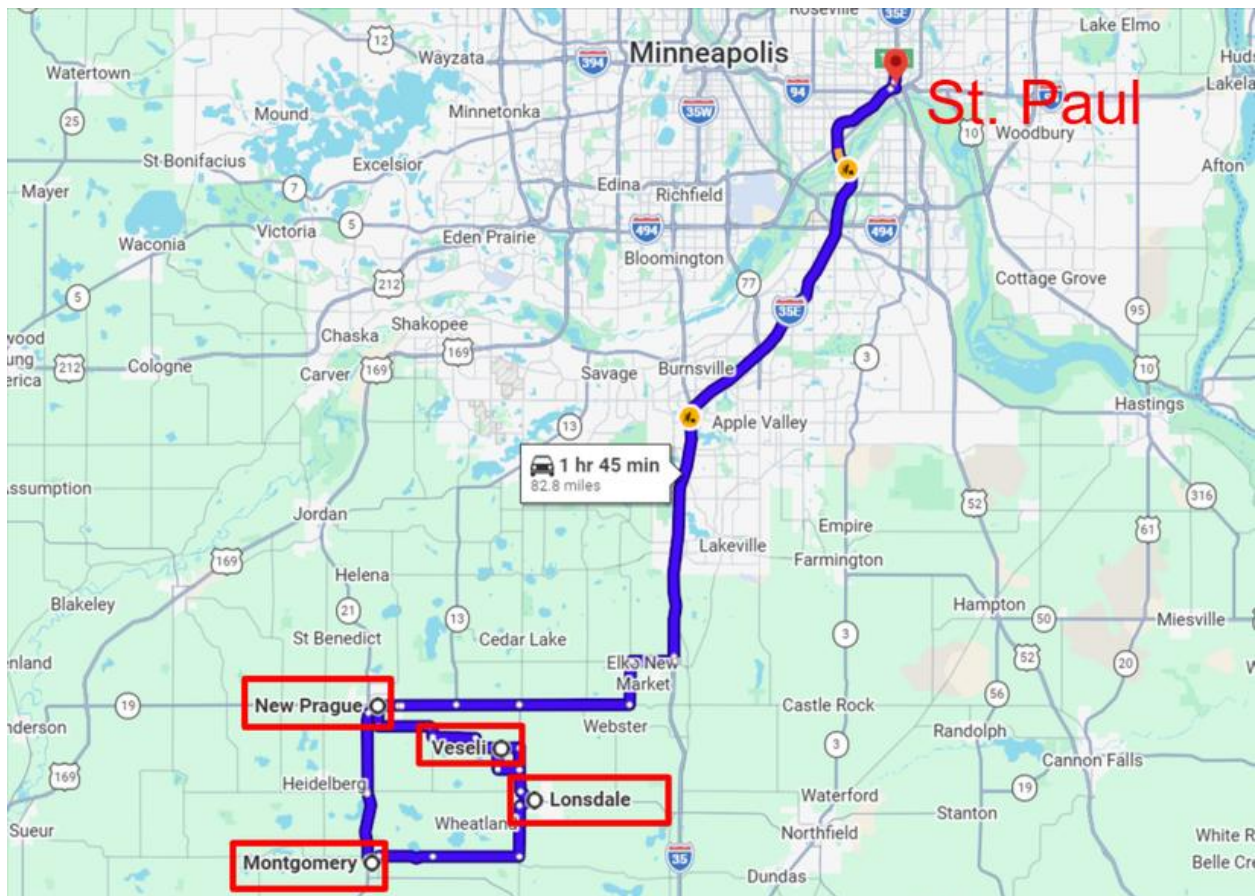
Minnesota's Bohemian Triangle

By Kytka Hilmarova

A reader's comment led me to one of the most unexpected Czech-American discoveries I have made in a long time: a pocket of southern Minnesota where Czech history is not merely remembered, but still woven into the names of towns, church steeples, festivals, murals, newspapers and family traditions. Known locally as the "Bohemian Triangle," the region around New Prague, Montgomery, Veseli and Lonsdale became one of the largest concentrations of Czech settlement in Minnesota. Some communities were named for places in the old country, Czech immigrants built parishes because walking eight miles through the woods to Mass was too difficult, and one town still celebrates koláče so enthusiastically that it calls itself the "Kolacky Capital of the World."

But the deeper I looked, the better the story became. There were Czech-language newspapers circulating across Minnesota, a historic Sokol hall in St. Paul that is still active today, an old mural honoring a 1906 Bohemian brass band, houses reportedly moved from one settlement to another when the railroad changed the region's future, and annual celebrations of Dožínky, Masopust and Czech heritage that continue more than 150 years after the first immigrants arrived. Beyond the paywall, I'm taking you through this remarkable little Czech world in Minnesota, town by town, with the history, traditions,

buildings, newspapers and surviving traces that reveal just how much of Bohemia these settlers managed to carry with them to the American prairie.



Screenshot from Google Maps with my highlights.

The story begins in the 1850s, when Bohemian immigrants began settling the wooded farmland of south-central Minnesota.



An impressive sign proudly welcomes visitors to New Prague, Minnesota.

New Prague was laid out in 1856, two years before Minnesota achieved statehood. Although the first settler on the immediate townsite, Anton Philipp, was German-born, Czech families followed very quickly and gave the settlement the identity that would define it for generations.

The community was at first known simply as Praha, later Prague and finally New Prague.

Life there was anything but easy. This was still part of Minnesota's Big Woods, and settlers had to clear dense forest before they could plant

fields. Roads were primitive, markets distant and transportation difficult. Yet the region attracted more and more immigrants from Bohemia, particularly as letters from successful settlers circulated back to Europe and relatives followed relatives into the Minnesota countryside.



By the late nineteenth century, New Prague and nearby Montgomery had become the center of a distinctly Czech rural district.

Minnesotské Noviny, or “Minnesota News,” was a Czech-language weekly published in St. Paul from 1904 to 1914 for Minnesota’s growing Bohemian-American community. It appeared as a Minnesota edition of the Omaha-based *Osvěta Americká* and was edited in St. Paul by Frank B. Matlach, a notary, insurance and real-estate agent who also taught evening English classes to Czech immigrants and later became the Czechoslovak consular representative in Minnesota.

The paper began as a modest four-page publication but grew considerably, carrying local Czech community news, political developments, fraternal announcements, wedding and death notices, advertisements, commodity prices and reports from Czech settlements across the state. Its correspondents sent news from places including Montgomery, New Prague, Veseli, Hopkins, Hutchinson, Owatonna, Silver Lake and many other Minnesota

communities, making the newspaper an important link between Czech families scattered across the state.



By 1911, *Minnesotské Noviny* had expanded to about 20 pages and was covering not only Minnesota but Czech-American communities in Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and South Dakota, while also bringing readers news from Bohemia and Moravia. The newspaper even encouraged subscribers to send gift subscriptions back to friends and relatives in the old homeland. Its existence reflects just how extensive and organized Czech-American life had become in Minnesota by the early twentieth century, particularly around St. Paul's West Seventh Street neighborhood and its Sokol and C.S.P.S. Hall.

In 1908, a competing Czech-language paper, *Minnesotský Pokrok*, began publishing in St. Paul, and in 1914 *Minnesotské Noviny* ceased publication when it was absorbed into that newspaper.

One fascinating detail preserved in the National Register documentation for Veseli is that many of the immigrants who settled this Minnesota Czech belt came from the Česká Budějovice region of southern Bohemia. That helps explain why place names from South Bohemia began appearing on the Minnesota landscape.



A 1989 mural of the 1906 Bohemian Brass Band adds Czech-American character.

Tiny settlements such as Budejovice, Litomysl and Veseli carried familiar names into the American Midwest. Unlike some Czech settlements farther south and west, particularly in Nebraska, the rural Minnesota Czech communities were strongly Roman Catholic, and their

churches became the anchors around which social and cultural life developed.

New Prague's St. Wenceslaus parish became one of the most important of those anchors. The parish traces its roots to the earliest Czech settlement period, when immigrants needed a church of their own in what was still heavily wooded country.



Hotel Broz, now an event center, the hotel was originally built in 1898 by Wenceslaus Broz, a Bohemian immigrant.

A log church was built in the late 1850s, followed by increasingly substantial buildings as the population grew. The National Register later described St. Wenceslaus as the visual and functional center of the surrounding Czech community.



Church of St Wenceslaus, 215 Main St E, New Prague, Minnesota.

The railroad transformed New Prague. When the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway arrived in 1877, farmers finally had a practical way to ship grain and other agricultural products to distant markets.

New Prague Area Historical Society

THE HISTORIC FLOUR MILL TOUR

Featuring the Mill's history as the headquarters of a flour milling company rivaling Pillsbury & Gold Medal Flour, the prominent Bean family who started it in the late 1800's, a place of employment for many locals who dedicated decades of their careers to flour milling, and the Mill's influence on our local community.

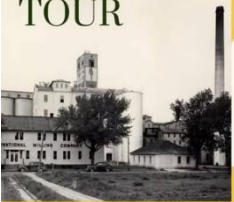
Saturday, July 11th
Open House
10am-2pm

Your ticket includes:

- A self-guided tour
- Museum-like experience
- Audio history of mill workers' memories
- \$3 off Udder Buddies
- Premium Vanilla Ice Cream

Tickets
(Best Purchased in Advance)
\$15/adult
Kids 10 & Under Free

Reserve Here: 



Grain elevators, mills, businesses and hotels followed, and New Prague developed into an important farm service center.

Its flour-milling industry became substantial enough that the town acquired the nickname "Flour City."

Just eight miles south, Montgomery became another major Czech center.

The area had already attracted Czech, German and Irish settlers before the town itself was platted along the railroad in 1877.

Czech cultural influence eventually became so dominant that Montgomery today proudly calls itself the "Kolacky Capital of the World."



Franke's bakery, famous for its Czech pastries, has been a Montgomery staple for over a century.

That title is not merely modern marketing. Montgomery has been celebrating Kolacky Days since 1929. The first festival reportedly drew thousands of visitors, and over the decades it evolved from a community harvest celebration into one of Minnesota's best-known ethnic festivals. Today it includes Czech food, music, dancing, traditional dress, a parade, a Bohemian market, baking contests and, appropriately enough, more koláče than anyone should probably attempt to count.



The spelling “kolacky” used in Minnesota is itself a little piece of immigrant history, an Americanized form of Czech koláče or koláčky. Local tradition includes both open-faced and folded versions filled with prune, poppy seed, apricot, apple, raspberry and other fruits. A Montgomery bakery tradition even preserves an explanation for the folded style: working men supposedly preferred the filling enclosed so it would not smear across everything in their lunch pails. Whether every Czech grandmother would agree on the terminology is another matter, but the pastry has unquestionably become central to Montgomery’s identity.



Kolacky Days continues to take Czech heritage seriously rather than treating it simply as a decorative festival theme. Recent programs have included Czech and Slovak folk dancers, traditional foods, Czech-themed exhibits, historical displays and performances by musicians associated with the local Czech community.

The St. Paul Czech and Slovak Folk Dancers, founded in 1962, regularly appear in Montgomery and continue to perform dances representing Bohemian, Moravian and Slovak traditions.



St. Paul Czech and Slovak Folk Dancers.

A few miles to the east lies Veseli, whose very name tells the story of its founders. The settlement was named for Veselí in South Bohemia, and historical accounts say many of its early residents came from that town or its surrounding region.

Veseli remained small, but for a time it was thriving enough to support stores, saloons, blacksmiths, a harness shop, a brewery and a population of several hundred people.

Its most striking landmark is the Church of the Most Holy Trinity.



Early Czech Catholic settlers living in the area had been walking approximately eight miles through wooded country to attend Mass in New Prague. In 1874, twenty families formally organized their own parish, and local farmers donated forty acres for the church and associated property. The first substantial church was completed in 1878.



The Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Veseli, Minnesota .

By the beginning of the twentieth century the Veseli congregation had grown enormously. The present church was built in 1905, when the parish numbered hundreds of families, and its scale reflects how substantial the Czech farming population once was around this little crossroads community. The original organ is still used today, and the parish celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2024.



Veseli's story also illustrates how railroads decided the fate of small Midwestern towns. The community expected transportation improvements that never arrived directly through the village. When a railroad line instead established Lonsdale a few miles away, businesses and residents began gravitating toward the new rail town. Some houses were reportedly placed on skids and physically moved from the Veseli area to Lonsdale using steam tractors.



Veseli residents moved their homes on skids to the new railway town.

Lonsdale was formally developed around the railroad at the beginning of the twentieth century and incorporated in 1903. Czech immigrants were among the town's founding population, and Czech identity remains important enough that the modern city flag deliberately includes the Czech flag as a symbol of Lonsdale's heritage.



Lonsdale downtown.

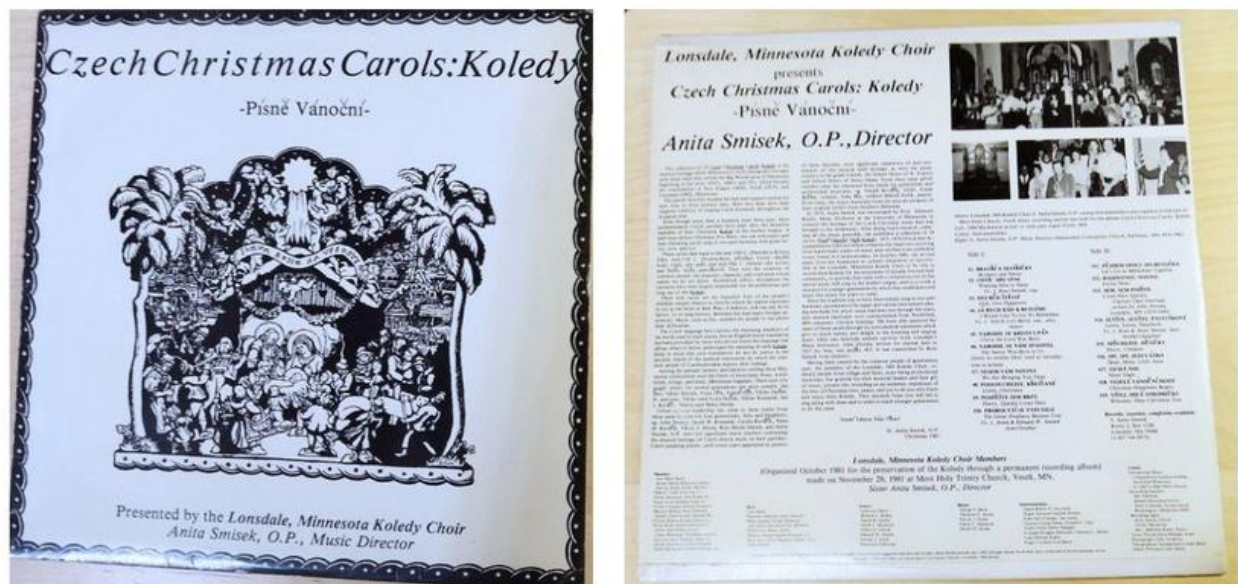
The city's own explanation states plainly that Lonsdale owes much of its early history to immigrants from what is now the Czech Republic.

That makes Lonsdale a natural fourth corner of the larger Czech cultural region, even if the traditional “triangle” originally centered more closely on New Prague, Montgomery and Veseli.

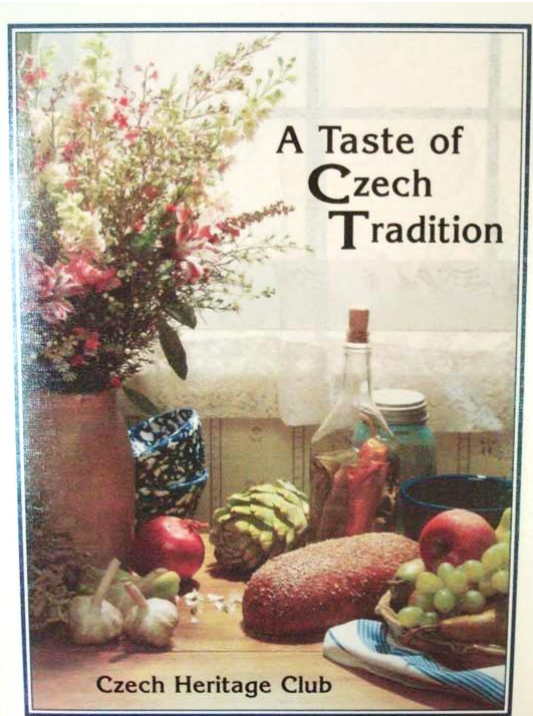


Lonsdale, Minnesota.

It also explains why a modern Czech Heritage Club can hold meetings and events interchangeably in New Prague, Montgomery and Lonsdale while participating in celebrations throughout the surrounding countryside.



The **Czech Heritage Club** is one of the clearest signs that this culture is not simply something preserved in old cemeteries and historical markers. Its stated mission is to preserve Czech culture in local communities, educate the public, revive customs that have fallen out of use, support preservation efforts and encourage pride in Czech heritage.



They offer a wonderful cookbook which is so much more than a cookbook. I love my copy and highly recommend it. Learn more here:

<https://www.czechheritageclub.com/Recipes.html>

Programs have included Czech films, kroje, music, glass and porcelain, genealogy, Czech literature, Easter customs, local history, folk crafts and the history of the concertina.



Czech Heritage Club at 2026 Kolacky Days.

Its 2026 calendar shows just how active the region remains. The club has participated in Masopust, May Day, Kolacky Days, Lonsdale Community Days and Czech-Fest in Veseli, while also preparing for New Prague's Dožínky celebration and St. Nicholas festivities later in the year.

That is an impressive amount of living Czech culture for a cluster of small Minnesota communities more than four thousand miles from Prague.

New Prague's great annual celebration is Dožínky, the Czech harvest festival.

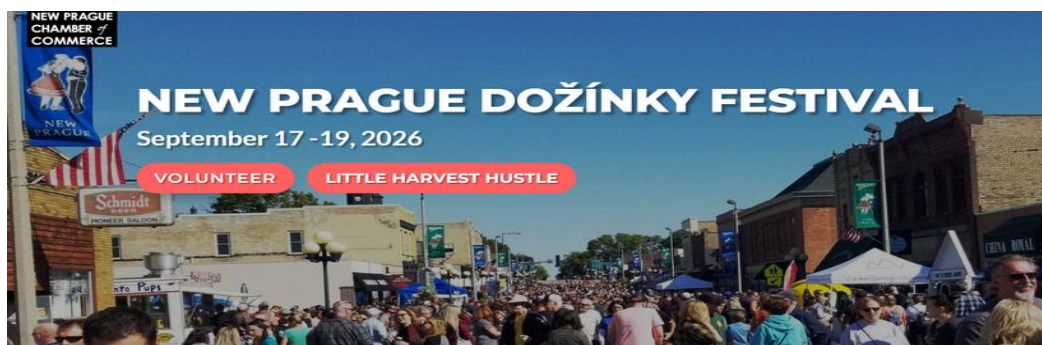


Dožinky Festival, 2023.

The word dožínky refers to traditional celebrations marking the completion of the grain harvest, and New Prague has transformed that Old World custom into a major community festival. Modern Dožínky includes Czech foods, historical displays, music, merchandise from the Czech Republic, a Czech Heritage Village and the wonderfully named Parade of Farm Pride, a reminder that the festival remains deeply connected with the agricultural world built by the original settlers.

For 2026, the 42nd annual New Prague Dožínky celebration is scheduled for September 17 through 19.

That makes this article especially timely: anyone in Minnesota who wants to experience the Bohemian Triangle while the Czech flags are flying, music is playing and Main Street is filled with heritage displays still has a chance to do it this month.



The Czech story in Minnesota does not end at the rural triangle. About an hour to the north, St. Paul developed its own substantial Bohemian neighborhood beginning in the nineteenth century. By the 1890s, the West End had Czech taverns, shops, Sokol organizations, Catholic institutions, schools and a dance hall. Czech immigrants there worked as butchers, carpenters, tailors, blacksmiths, cigar makers and other tradespeople, producing a much more urban Czech-American world than the farming communities to the south.

At the center of that history stands the C.S.P.S. Hall on Michigan Street. Czech and Slovak Sokol Minnesota traces its organization to 1882 and continues to operate from the historic hall, which was built in 1887. The organization describes the building as the longest-serving Czech-Slovak cultural center in the United States and one of Minnesota's oldest immigrant halls still functioning in its original cultural role.



C.S.P.S. Hall, also known as Czech Hall or as CSPS Sokol Hall. 383 W Michigan St, St Paul, MN 55102.

Sokol itself began in Prague in 1862 under Miroslav Tyrš and Jindřich Fügner, combining gymnastics with physical discipline, civic education and Czech national consciousness. In immigrant communities abroad, Sokol often became much more than a gymnasium. It was

a place to speak Czech, teach children, organize dances and theatrical productions, discuss politics, celebrate national holidays and create a community that could survive far from home. Minnesota's Sokol continues that tradition through cultural, educational, social and physical programs.

What makes Minnesota's Bohemian Triangle so interesting to me is that it preserves both sides of the Czech-American story.

Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azuU0DfHbyM&t=8s>



There are the obvious things we love to celebrate: koláče, polka music, kroje, beer, festivals and familiar Czech surnames. But beneath them lies a much deeper landscape created by immigration. Churches were built because families once walked miles through forests to worship. Towns appeared because railroads crossed prairie and timberland. Czech place names survived because settlers wanted pieces of South Bohemia around them. Festivals exist because later generations decided that assimilation did not have to mean forgetting.

The geography itself has become a kind of archive. New Prague remembers Praha. Veseli remembers Veselí. Old settlements carried names such as Budejovice and Litomysl.

St. Wenceslaus watches over one community while Most Holy Trinity anchors another. Montgomery celebrates koláče every July, and New Prague celebrates the harvest with Dožínky every September. Even Lonsdale's municipal flag quietly carries the Czech tricolor into the present.



That may be the most remarkable thing about the Bohemian Triangle. The people who created it arrived before there was an independent Czechoslovakia, and many came from villages whose names their American descendants may no longer know. Yet more than 150 years later, their language, recipes, saints, dances, festivals and memories continue to shape the identity of this corner of Minnesota.



Jarrod Schoenecker's photo "Still Making Memories" was the winner for the People's Choice Award in the Kolacky Days Photo Contest.

A reader's comment sent me looking for the Bohemian Triangle, and I am very glad it did. I suspect many of us who think we know Czech America well still have places like this waiting to be discovered. Minnesota deserves a much larger place on the Czech-American map, and I have a feeling this will not be the last time we visit New Prague, Montgomery, Veseli, Lonsdale and St. Paul here on Everything Czech.

Until next time,

Kytka Hilmarova

Founder of Everything Czech

<https://patreon.com/kytka>

Minnesota's "Bohemian Triangle" Featured in New Czech-American History Article

By Kytka Hilmar

The Czech history tucked into southern Minnesota is receiving new attention through a recent [Everything Czech](#) feature exploring an area long known as Minnesota's "Bohemian Triangle."

Centered around **New Prague, Montgomery, Lonsdale and Veseli**, the region became home to generations of Czech and Bohemian immigrants whose influence can still be found in local churches, cemeteries, family names, food, music and community celebrations. Historical records describe New Prague and the surrounding communities as one of Minnesota's most important centers of Bohemian settlement, extending through portions of Scott, Le Sueur and Rice counties.

The idea for the article came from a reader of [Everything Czech](#) who mentioned Minnesota's Bohemian Triangle in a discussion about Czech America. That simple comment led author, translator and publisher **Kytka Hilmarova** to begin digging into the history of Czech settlement in the region.

Czech immigration to Minnesota began in the 1850s, with especially significant communities developing in southern Minnesota. By the early twentieth century, Czech-language newspapers were reporting from communities across the state, including New Prague and Montgomery, helping immigrants remain connected to one another and to events in their ancestral homeland.

More than a century later, that heritage remains visible. Czech music has been passed through generations, while local festivals and cultural organizations continue traditions that once helped newly arrived immigrants make Minnesota feel like home. The New Prague, Montgomery, Lonsdale and Veseli area has continued to identify with its Czech roots well into the modern era.

For Hilmar, stories such as Minnesota's Bohemian Triangle are part of a much larger effort to document **Czech America before its smaller stories disappear**.

"Czech-American history isn't found only in history books," Hilmar said. "It is in cemeteries, church records, old photographs, recipes, family stories and the memories people still carry. Every time someone tells me, 'My grandparents came from Bohemia and settled here,' there is another piece of our history waiting to be preserved."

The full article is part of Hilmar's ongoing [Everything Czech](#) work documenting Czech history, culture and communities across the United States.

About the Author

Kytka Hilmarová is a Czech-born author, translator, publisher, and cultural historian whose work is devoted to preserving Czech history, literature, traditions, folklore, and the Czech-American experience for English-speaking readers. She is the creator of **Everything Czech**, an extensive online collection of articles exploring Czech history, people, customs, food, language, music, literature, and the stories of Czech communities across the United States.

Under the name Kytka Hilmarová, her Czech-focused books include *Czech History; The Guide to Czech Identity: Am I Czech, Bohemian, or Moravian?; Don't Call Me Gypsy: A Journey through Czech Romani History and Fairy Tales; Duj Duj Dešuduj: The Romani Soul of Czech Music; History of Jews in the Czech Lands; A Nation Carried in Words: Czech Voices in Exile; Courageous Women: Stories of Czech Women in the Fight for Freedom; Vanishing Slavs in an Uncertain Europe: Mucha's Slav Epic and the Last Stand for Slavic Survival; King of May: The Brief Reign of Allen Ginsberg in Czechoslovakia; Masaryktown: Czechs and Slovaks in Florida; Wisdom from the Sky: Czech and Slovak Folk Weather Wisdom Through the Seasons; A Taste of Prague; Fairies and Witches*, and books in her Extraordinary Czechs series on figures including Jiří Trnka, John Comenius, Saint Wenceslaus, Václav Havel, Franz Kafka, and Charter 77. Her work also includes English translations of Czech texts, including Božena Němcová's *Karla*, as part of her effort to make important Czech writing accessible to readers who cannot read the originals.

For younger readers, she writes as Daisy Hilmar, creating illustrated books that introduce children to Czech traditions, history, food, family life, and cultural identity through stories rather than textbooks. Her Czech children's books include *Making Bábovka with My Babička, My Grandma Came from Czechoslovakia: The Country That Keeps Changing Names, The Little Light of Dušičky, Let's Go Tramping, Little Brother, Close the Gate: A Child's Story of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, What Being Czech Is About, The Woods That Welcomed Us*, and *Visit Czech Nebraska*, the first title in her Visit Czech America series.

Whether she is translating a nineteenth-century Czech author, documenting a nearly forgotten Czech-American settlement, explaining an old custom, or introducing a child to bábovka, Dušičky, or tramping, Hilmarová's purpose remains the same: to keep Czech heritage from becoming something remembered only in the past, and instead pass it forward to the next generation.

Books by Kytka Hilmarová and Daisy Hilmar can be found on Amazon, while her continuing articles and cultural research appear through Everything Czech.

Kytka's book catalog: <https://the-photo-vault.my.canva.site/the-collected-works-of-kytka>