

Slovaks in Canada

Halmo History, as told by Steve Halmo

Stefan Halmo, my father, was born in Brodany, Slovakia in 1885. He farmed near the village, and for a time served as its mayor. In 1910 he married Angela Dragula, and in the next years they had 4 children: Steve, Mary, Rudy, and Anne.

Newspapers from the United States brought news of open land in Canada. Meanwhile, the WWI broke out, during all of which dad was part of the Austrian army. By the mid 1920's it seemed to dad that another war would be coming, so he wanted his family to emigrate.

Another family who made the decision to come to Canada was Joe Bobot, my mother's brother-in-law, and his wife. In 1929 they, along with our six-member family, boarded the *Ascania* at Cherbourg, France. After seven days of sailing we arrived at Quebec City, then took a train to Winnipeg where we began to look for land. It was with great relief that we met priest, Father Toman, who knew of good land in the Kuroki-Margo area, where several families had already settled.

Late in summer we arrived at Pete Kotasek's farm. Mother cried when her precious linens were put in the barn where there was only a straw roof to keep them dry. For a couple of weeks we helped with haying, stooking, and scrubbing while dad tried to obtain land for us.

We bought from Jack O'Brien an open quarter of land, northwest of Kuroki. Some buildings were already there, and a crop — 300 bushels of wheat! We were glad to have the 2-room log house as our new home, however crowded and cold it was for 4 adults and 4 older children.

Life was much different than in Europe, where being in a village, we were closely associated with friends and neighbours. Here, things were much more isolated. Mother shed a good many tears of loneliness during this time. Nearly every day, she walked to town, a distance of nearly two miles to get the mail and attend the morning mass.

Threshing time brought the neighbours together and we enjoyed that in spite of the hard work. We threshed with Jim Prince and Ed Malish. I especially remember one time at Lintlaw near the end of October. There was a heavy frost and it was very cold; we had to sleep at the edge of the haystack each night. One morning

we awoke to see the ground covered with frost. It was like winter; no wonder I have rheumatism now! Sometimes we slept in plywood trailers and they too were very cold.

I remember another time around 1930 when my uncle, my dad and I went to Christmas midnight mass in Kelvington. It was very cold — about 20 below zero, and so frosty that you could not see ahead of you. On the way home we had to make a fresh trail from the highway to the farmyard. The team lost the trail and because of zero visibility we were going in circles and it took us almost three hours to get to the buildings. In another incident I took a load of wood to Wadena to sell. I expected to get about \$2.00 for my long day's work, but the best bargain I could get was 50 cents and four jars of honey!

In 1933, aunt Mary Bobot passed away, and the following summer her husband took their young child back to Slovakia where they remained. In 1934 I decided to go out to work. I worked with Alex Ziola on his horse baler. We



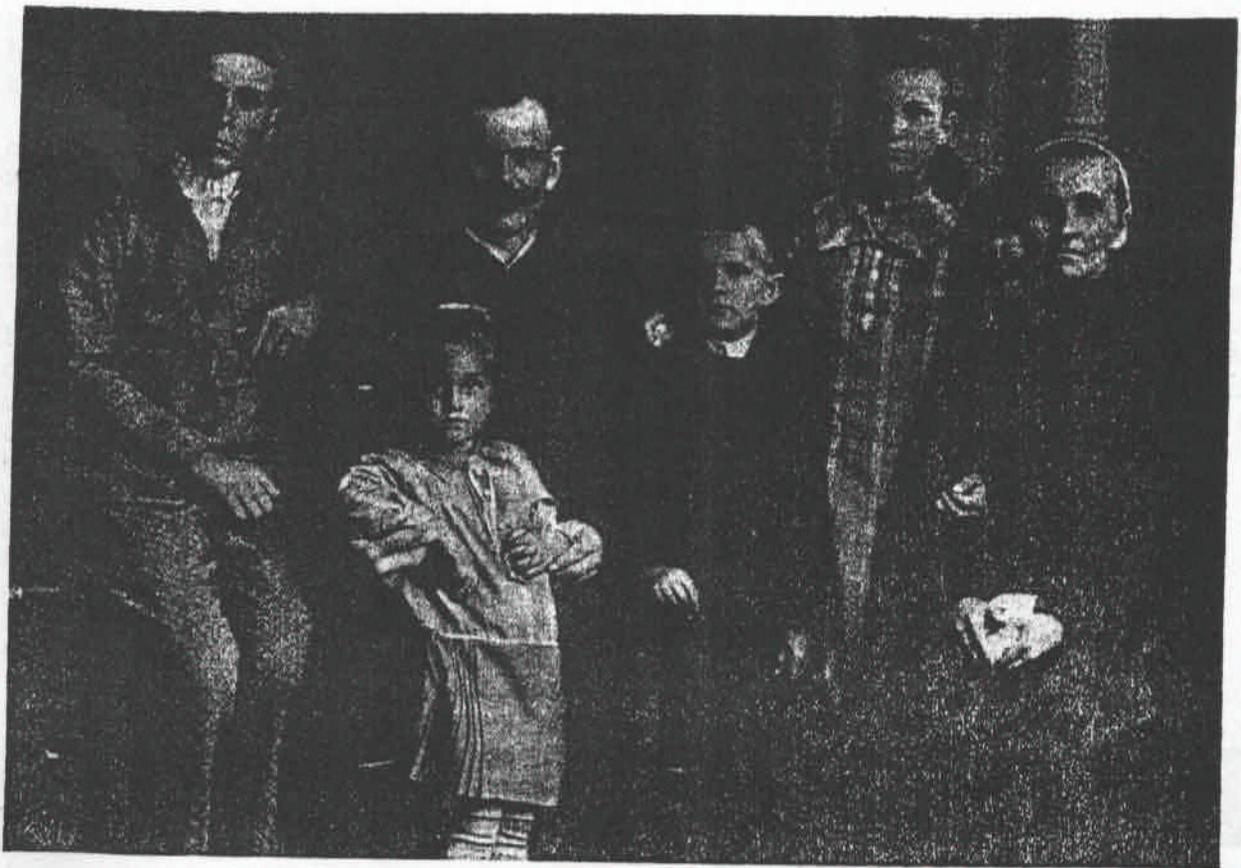
Steve Halmo, far right, in bush camp at Rainy River Ontario.

baled straw for 10 cents a ton, and sometimes made as much as 35 cents a day. We spent most of that winter baling straw.

The following winter I walked to Lintlaw with a pack on my back, then 27 miles further to a lumber camp. I walked behind a loaded sleigh most of the way in. My job was a swamper and chainer. By spring I had saved \$47.50 and I thought that was a lot of money.

I remember coming out about the 10th of April and going to the town a few days later. I froze my face on the way which never happened at 50 below zero in the bush camp where my whiskers protected my face. But after a shave, those prairie winds...!

During the winter, Mary, Rudy and Annie had to walk through deep snow on their way to school in Kuroki. In 1937, our cousin from Ontario wrote saying that Mary could have a job in



Stefan Halmo family before they came to Canada; Slovakia 1929. L. to R. Steve Jr., Stefan Sr., Anne, Rudy, Mary, Angela.

Windsor, so she left the farm. Rudy had an offer to take a jewelry course, so he made a hasty decision to leave Saskatchewan, also for Windsor.

In 1937 I worked for Mr. Kieltyka during the summer, but because it was dry here, I went to Manitoba for harvest. A cattle buyer, Mr. Raymond of Margo, let me go with his stock freight to look after them on their train trip to Winnipeg. After harvesting at Dominion City, I returned to Winnipeg and worked briefly picking vegetables for \$1.00 a day. I spent that winter at Rainy River, Ontario, receiving the much improved pay of \$47.50 per month, then returned to the farm to stay.

In 1940 my dad assigned me the home quarter of land; he moved to a quarter purchased from Mrs. Fensil. A year later he bought the adjoining quarter from Dave Innes from the Pas. They now owned the half section, southeast of Kuroki. Dad bought a house from a local school teacher, Louise Enright, and had it moved to his new farm. Anne was the only one left at home; she travelled back and forth between the

two places, helping me cook and clean on weekends, and attending school from my folk's place. By this time Mary had moved to Toronto, and soon Anne left to seek employment there.

Life was easier for dad because there was hay and wood on the farm and they did not have to be hauled long distances. However one drawback was that the farm did not have an adequate supply of water so it had to be hauled. The road to the farm was in poor condition.

We began to break some land using horses. Later, even when I had a tractor, I used the same sixteen inch horse breaker which had no power lift, so on the start of each furrow I had to jump off to put it into the ground, and at the end of each furrow lift it out without stopping the tractor. In 1940 we bought a tractor and used it for one summer, then due to a drop in grain prices, dad said we could not keep it anymore. It was difficult to go back to using horses.

In December 1942, I married Anna McBrearty (nee Kieltyka). We bought more land and I sometimes had to hire someone with a tractor to keep up with the work. We paid our hired

help with cream cheques and egg cheques; one fellow said, „This is the first time I've been paid before I got off the field.”

Our daughter, Joan, was born in December of 1945. We had meanwhile bought more land and in 1946 purchased from Alex Ziola a farm just east of Kuroki, where we still live. Our younger daughter, Donalda, was born in July, 1948.

We got our first car in 1949...In 1951 we bought a house and some property in town and decided the following year to build a new home on the farm. Around 1950, my parents rented out their land and retired, moving into town. Mother enjoyed crocheting and embroidery work. She also continued to bake the traditional Slovakian pastries, filled with poppy seeds, fruit or cheese. Dad raised large and abundant gardens year after year, taking pride in his variety of produce. He remained robust and physically active into his early eighties...

In the summer of 1975, my two daughters and I decided to visit Europe. First we visited our native village Brodany, where I had spent the first sixteen years of my life. We were warmly received by our many relatives, and I even remembered some of them, as we had corresponded over the years. After spending a week there we embarked on a three week bus tour of other European countries.

Mother passed away in 1959 at the age of 67. Dad passed away in 1972 at the age of 86; he is buried alongside mother in St. Helen's cemetery.

Rudy with his wife Norma (nee Murray) and their four sons, lives in Simcoe, Ontario, where he owns a jewellery store. Mary also lives there and assists him with the business. Anne, married to Joe Crane, has two daughters and resides in Toronto. Our elder daughter, Joan, has taken graduate studies in music and liturgy, and lives in Saskatoon with her husband, Dr. Michael Pomedli. Donalda, a teacher, is married to Raymond Walter, and has two daughters, Kathryn and Barbara. They live on the home farm at Kuroki.



Moving barn from Novak's farm to Steve Halm's farm, 1951.