

# Procopius Neuzil and the Bohemian Benedictine Press

A Vignette from the History of Czech-American Print Culture in Chicago

Thomas M. Dousa, *University of Chicago Library*

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Those of us at the University of Chicago Library who know Sandra Levy can count ourselves fortunate, for she is undoubtedly one of the sweetest, friendliest, and most humane people to have worked at our institution. Especially fortunate are those who have had the happy experience of traveling with her in her automobile. Whether braving the busy streets of Chicago or coursing along the secluded stretch of a highway, Sandra is truly in her element when behind the wheel and her passengers cannot but admire her consummate skill as a driver. Yet, more importantly, trips with Sandra provide the occasion for conversation, another art at which she excels. In the course of conversations on the road, Sandra relishes speaking about the many things that interest her and bring her joy: her background as the descendent of Galician Jewish immigrants who settled on the North Side of Chicago; her experiences as a student of Russian history and, afterwards, a Slavic librarian; her peregrinations along her favorite highways, especially the storied Route 66; and her favorite reading material – science fiction literature – as well as the science fiction conventions that she enjoys attending. In my own experience, such conversations have revealed her to be someone who is both remarkably open to the world and, at the same time, has a firm sense of who she is and what she stands for – a truly felicitous combination of traits for a single individual to have.

In this paper, I wish to discuss a theme that I first encountered while cataloging monographic materials for the Archives of Czechs and Slovaks Abroad (ACASA), one of the premier collections in the world of documents relating to Czech emigrant history and print culture: the story of the beginnings of the leading Czech-American Catholic publishing house – the Bohemian Benedictine Press [in Czech: Tiskárna českých benediktinů], which was based in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago – and the man who founded it, Rev. Procopius Charles Neuzil, O.S.B. (Figure 1). To my mind, this theme is an appropriate one to broach here for two reasons. First, the ACASA collection has been a primary point of professional connection between Sandra and me, especially after she took over the curatorship of the collection following the untimely passing of June Pachuta Farris in 2018. Second, the story of the Bohemian Benedictine Press and its founder is one in which a number of different histories converge – the history of Chicago, the

history of Slavic (in particular, Czech) immigration, and the history of Slavic print culture in the United States. It is my hope that this little study will be of interest to Sandra as a native Chicagoan who loves her city, as a Slavist with a strong historical orientation, and as a librarian who has devoted her career to making the fruits of Slavic print culture accessible to students and scholars. I dedicate it to her with affection, admiration, and all best wishes.

## From Bechyně to Chicago: Becoming Procopius Neuzil

Our story begins in the town of Bechyně, located some 12 miles to the southwest of the city of Tábor in Southern Bohemia, where Karel Neuzil was born on 3 November 1861.<sup>1</sup> He was the fourth of five children born to Jan Neuzil, a stonemason (*zedník*), and his wife Kateřina.<sup>2</sup> When Karel was five years old, his family moved to the nearby village of Srlín. These were years of considerable economic hardship for the Neuzil family: Jan worked as a seasonal laborer in Vienna, living with his family only during the winter months, and Kateřina generally had to manage the household on a meager budget.<sup>3</sup> In 1874, like many other impoverished families from the region, the Neuzils decided to seek their fortunes abroad and emigrated to the United States. There, they purchased land near Spillville, a small town in northeastern Iowa, and established a farm.<sup>4</sup> Their decision to settle near Spillville was doubtless conditioned by the fact that it and its hinterlands had a sizeable Czech population: they would thus be living in fairly familiar cultural and linguistic surroundings. Another factor, though, may have been the religious profile of the Czech community there: it was strongly Roman Catholic in orientation and this may have appealed to the Neuzils, who were, by all accounts, a deeply religious family.<sup>5</sup>

The first few years in Spillville were difficult ones for the Neuzil family, as they sought to keep their new farm in operation. They were especially challenging for young Karel Neuzil – now, Charles Neuzil – who had a thirst for learning and had by now discerned the vocation to become a priest. Although he was able to attend the local parochial school between the harvesting and planting seasons, his family could not afford to finance the higher studies

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<sup>1</sup> A. Plachtová, “Prokop Neuzil”, Oficiální Stránky Města Bechyně. Accessed February 10, 2021, <https://www.mestobechyne.cz/cs/mesto-bechyne/osobnosti/prokop-neuzil.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Neuzil, “Neuzil, Jan and Katerina (Jaros)”, in *Winneshiek County, Iowa: Biographies – 1996: A Genealogical Record* (Decorah, Iowa: Decorah Genealogy Association, [1996]), N19; “Ndp. Prokop Neuzil, O.S.B., opat kláštera sv. Prokopa v Lisle, Ill. zemřel”, *Katolík: Česko-Americký kalendář*, 54 (1948): 177.

<sup>3</sup> “Ndp. Prokop Neuzil, O.S.B.”: 177.

<sup>4</sup> F. Mikolášek, V. Šindelář, & J. Kadlec, *Srlín: Dějiny obce a hasičského sboru* (Milevisko: Agentura Porthos, 1998), [11].

<sup>5</sup> A. Plachtová, “Prokop Neuzil”; Rebecca Neuzil, “Neuzil, Jan and Katerina (Jaros)”, N19. On Czech settlement in Spillville and its Catholic ambience in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Jan Habenicht, *Dějiny Čechův amerických* (St. Louis: Hlas, 1910), 354-359.

needed to enter the priesthood.<sup>6</sup> In his late teenage years, Charles made repeated efforts to gain admittance to seminary but was repeatedly rejected by clergy and church officials who did not believe that an unprepossessing young man from a poor background was a good candidate for a clerical career.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, his belief in his vocation and his drive for further study did not abate. Funding himself by working for nine months as a field hand for a Swedish farmer near Madison, Wisconsin, he was able to undertake studies at a Teachers' Institute in Decorah, Iowa, and, upon graduation in 1880, began to teach at a school in the hamlet of Calmar near Spillville.<sup>8</sup>

Charles Neuzil would not, however, remain a country schoolmaster for long. In March 1881, an article published in the Czech-American Catholic newspaper *Hlas* announced that Rev. Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., the abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Vincent in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, was inviting Czech men to join the order and train for the priesthood, in the hopes of establishing a monastery that would provide missionary priests for Czech-Americans in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Alerted to this opportunity by his parish priest, Charles immediately submitted an application for this program and was accepted. Thus, in September 1881, at the age of twenty, he began scholastic studies at St. Vincent College.<sup>10</sup> Upon finishing his scholastic in 1884, Charles entered the novitiate at St. Vincent Abbey, professing his simple vows as a Benedictine monk a year later on 11 July 1885.<sup>11</sup> He took "Procopius" as his name in religion in honor of St. Procopius (ca. 970-1053), the founding abbot of the Benedictine abbey at Sázava, located some 16 miles to the south of Prague. This choice of name was significant, for St. Procopius was a Czech national saint renowned for having cultivated the Old Church Slavonic liturgy at Sázava and so having kept alive a distinctly Slavic form of Christianity at a time when the Czech lands had, under German ecclesiastical influence, adopted a Latin form of Christianity.<sup>12</sup> To take the name "Procopius" as one's own was thus not only to proclaim

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<sup>6</sup> On Charles Neuzil's elementary studies, see Cyril and Rebecca Neuzil, "Neuzil, (Charles) The Rt. Rev. Procopius" in *Winneshiek County, Iowa: Biographies – 1996: A Genealogical Record* (Decorah, Iowa : Decorah Genealogy Association, [1996]), N14; "Ndp. Prokop Neuzil": 177.

<sup>7</sup> For lively, though slightly divergent, accounts of Charles's attempts at admittance to seminary, see A. Plachtová, "Prokop Neuzil"; Cyril and Rebecca Neuzil, "Neuzil, (Charles) The Rt. Rev. Procopius", N14; "Ndp. Prokop Neuzil, O.S.B.": 177; Vitus Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle: St. Procopius Abbey, 1885-1985* (Lisle, Illinois: St. Procopius Abbey, 1985), 25.

<sup>8</sup> "Ndp. Prokop Neuzil, O.S.B.": 177; Daniel D. Droba (ed.), *Czech and Slovak Leaders in Metropolitan Chicago: A Biographical Study of 300 Prominent Men and Women of Czech and Slovak Descent* (Chicago: Slavonic Club of the University of Chicago, 1934), 142.

<sup>9</sup> See Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. In Roman Catholic priestly education, scholastic studies are preparatory general studies undertaken prior to commencing more specialized theological studies proper. It is worth noting that, at that time, St. Vincent College, in conformity with Rev. Wimmer's program of training up a cadre of priests to serve the Czech-American community, was offering classes in Czech language – the only institution of higher learning in the United States to do so in the early 1880s. See Peter Mizera, *Czech Benedictines in America: 1877-1901* (Lisle, Illinois : St. Procopius College, Center for Slav Culture, 1969), 24; George R. Noyes, "The Beginnings of Slavic Instruction in the United States", *Bulletin of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages*, 7, no. 2 (December 15, 1949), 26;

<sup>11</sup> Cyril and Rebecca Neuzil, "Neuzil, (Charles) The Rt. Rev. Procopius", N14.

<sup>12</sup> On St. Procopius, see Jaroslav Kadlec, "Svatý Prokop" in *Bohemia Sancta: Životopisy českých světců a přátel Božích*, ed. by Jaroslav Kadlec (Praha: Česká katolická charita, 1989), 126-139; *Saint Procopius, Abbot of Sazava* (Chicago: Benedictine Abbey Press, 1961).

allegiance to the Benedictine order within a distinctly Czech context but to signal commitment to the preservation of Slavic language, culture, and tradition.

After the profession of his vows, Procopius Neuzil continued more advanced theological studies for the priesthood at St. Vincent Abbey. These, however, lasted only a year, for he began experiencing health problems and so, in September 1886, he was sent to Chicago to undergo medical treatment.<sup>13</sup> There he was assigned to stay at St. Procopius Church, located at the corner of West 18<sup>th</sup> and South Allport streets in the Pilsen neighborhood on the Lower West Side of the city. One year earlier, this large Czech-American parish, which had been founded in 1875 and was the third oldest Czech parish in the city, had been placed under the superintendence of the Benedictine order with the understanding that it would become the home of the new monastery of Czech Benedictine missionary priests that the abbot of St. Vincent Abbey had planned for so long.<sup>14</sup> When Procopius arrived there, the Benedictine priory, at that time canonically dependent on St. Vincent Abbey, consisted of three priests, who took charge of his further training as he regained his health.<sup>15</sup> The little community that he had joined would develop quickly: in May 1888, when St. Procopius Priory became an independent priory, it counted eight founding members.<sup>16</sup> It was as a member of this priory that Procopius Neuzil professed his solemn vows on 15 June 1888 and, six months later, was ordained to the priesthood on 22 December.<sup>17</sup>

## Catholics and Freethinkers: Religious and Cultural Conflict in Czech Chicago

The Czech-American urban community in Chicago where Rev. Procopius Neuzil found himself in the late 1880s was vibrant and variegated. In the final three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chicago was home to the largest Czech-American enclave in the United States and would soon constitute one of the largest urban concentrations of Czechs in the world.<sup>18</sup> Living primarily in the Pilsen and

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<sup>13</sup> “Ndp. Prokop Neuzil, O.S.B.”: 179; Cyril and Rebecca Neuzil, “Neuzil, (Charles) The Rt. Rev. Procopius”, N14; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> On the early history of St. Procopius Church, see Habenicht, *Dějiny Čechův amerických*, 623-628.

<sup>15</sup> On the background to, and beginnings of, the Benedictine presence at St. Procopius, see Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 18-24; Peter Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 90-100.

<sup>16</sup> Buresh, *the Procopian Chronicle*, 27; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 106-108. Actually, papal approval for the granting St. Procopius priory independent status had been granted in August 1887, but because of delays in communication, became only effective in May of the following year.

<sup>17</sup> “Ndp. Prokop Neuzil, O.S.B.”: 179; Buresh, *the Procopian Chronicle*, 27; Habenicht, *Dějiny Čechův amerických*, 628.

<sup>18</sup> On the ascendance of Chicago as the largest urban Czech-American community in the United States in the 1870s and 1880s, see Marek Vlha, *Mezi starou vlastí a Amerikou: Počátky české krajanské komunity v USA 19. století* (Brno: Matice Moravská, 2015), 157-158. By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chicago was considered to have the third-largest Czech urban community in the world, after Prague and Vienna; see Jaroslav E. S. Vojan, “České Chicago”, in *Adresář a almanach českého obyvatelstva v Chicagu = Directory and Almanac of the Bohemian Population of Chicago* (Chicago: Spolek pro postavení Česko-Americké Nemocnice, 1915), 29; J. E. Salaba Vojan, “Česká Amerika”, in *Česká čítanka* (Praha: Sbor zástupců České svobodomyšlné školy, 1912), 416.

Lawndale neighborhoods on the West Side of Chicago, members of the Czech community shared a common language and a strong sense of ethnic identity that manifested itself in a rich and vigorous associational life.<sup>19</sup> However, there also existed a significant social cleavage among the Czechs of Chicago, one that reflected a division found in Czech-American communities throughout the United States. The source of this division lay in different attitudes to religious belief. With regard to religion, American Czechs generally belonged to one of three broad groups: Catholics, Protestants, or Freethinkers.<sup>20</sup> The two most numerous of these were Freethinkers and Catholics and it was among these two camps that social tensions and hostility ran particularly deep.

Most Czech immigrants to the United States had been members of the Catholic Church in their homeland, for Catholicism was the state religion of the Austro-Hungarian empire and had formed part of the socio-cultural *koine* of the Czech lands since the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> Many continued to hold to their faith in the New World: however, many more came to abandon their allegiance to the Church.<sup>22</sup> The majority of those who left the Catholic fold came to align themselves with an ideology known as *svobodomyslnost*, or Freethought. Espoused by members of a nationalistic, politically liberal intelligentsia informed by Enlightenment thought and inflamed by opposition to Habsburg rule, Czech-American Freethought embodied a common set of attitudes about religion, society, and political life.<sup>23</sup> With regard to religion, “[F]reethinkers generally believed in

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<sup>19</sup> For general surveys of Czech Chicago in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, see, e.g., Vojan, “České Chicago”, 37-68; Martin Nekola, *České Chicago* (Praha: NLN, 2017); Jaroslav Kříž & Lenka Křížová, *Střípky z českého Chicaga: Edice dokumentů k dějinám Čechů v americkém Chicagu v letech 1848-1918* (Praha: Academia, 2017), 22-52. On Czech-American organizations in Chicago, see also Jaroslav Kříž, “České spolky v Chicagu”, in *České, slovenské a československé dějiny 20. století X*, ed. by Pavel Horák, Pavel Boštík, & Jaromír Karpíšek (Hradec Králové: Univerzita Hradec Králové, 2015), 139-147.

<sup>20</sup> Krasimira Marholeva, “Chicagští katolíci a svobodomyslní Češi v druhé polovině XIX. století”, *Studia Historica Brunensia*, 61, no. 2 (2014): 73; see also Marek Vlha, “Poslední služba zesnulým ve svobodomyslné Americe a Český národní hřbitov v Chicagu: sonda do náboženského milieu česko-amerického svobodomyslného hnutí”, in Miloš Havelka a kol., *Víra, kultura a společnost: náboženské kultury v českých zemích 19. a 20. století*. (Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2012), 330-331. A sense of the relative proportions between the three religious groups can be gained from conditions in 1910, when “freethinkers ... constituted slightly over half of the Czech-speaking American population ..., Catholics at least forty percent, and Protestants no more than five percent”; Bruce M. Garver, “Czech-American Protestants: A Minority within a Minority”, *Nebraska History*, 74(3-4), 1993: 150. Though comparable statistics are lacking for the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is unlikely that the low proportion of Protestants relative to Freethinkers and Catholics would have differed much from that in 1910.

<sup>21</sup> According to one commentator, under Austrian rule in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, approximately 96% of the people in the Czech lands were Catholics; 2%, Protestants; 1%, Jews, and the rest, Old Catholics, without confession, or mixed; see Thomas Čapek, *The Czechs (Bohemians) in America: A Study of their National, Cultural, Political, Social, Economic, and Religious Life* (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 119.

<sup>22</sup> A comparison of the proportions of Czech religious affiliations in the Czech lands and in the United States cited in nn. 20 and 21 above underscores how precipitous this process of decatholicization was: the number of Czech Catholics dropped from 96% in the Old World to about 40% in the New, while the number of unchurched Czechs rose from less than 1% in the Czech to over 50% in the United States.

<sup>23</sup> For general discussions of Czech-American Freethought, see Karel D. Bicha, “Settling Accounts with an Old Adversary: The Decatholicization of Czech immigrants in America”, *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 8 (1971): 45-60; Vlha, *Mezi starou vlastí a Amerikou*, 252-271; Marek Vlha, “Česká komunita ve Spojených státech a náboženský konflikt”, in *Variety české religiosity v “dlouhém” 19. století (1780-1918)*, ed. by Zdeněk R. Nešpor & Kristina Kaiserová (Ústí nad Labem: Kristina Kaiserová, albis international, 2010), 407-410.



human progress and expected reason and scientific inquiry to supplant belief in a supreme being,” while, as regards social and political life, they espoused the “extension of civil liberties, absolute separation of church and state, universal suffrage, and gradual emancipation of women.”<sup>24</sup> There was little unanimity among Freethinkers in matters of personal belief. Some were militant rationalists and atheists who embraced philosophical materialism and eschewed religious sentiment entirely; others took a secular humanist position that invested human-derived ethics and morality with ultimate, indeed quasi-religious, meaning; some were agnostic or simply indifferent to religion; while yet others believed in a deity but had little use for organized religion.<sup>25</sup> What united the different kinds of Czech-American Freethinkers was, above all, an anticlerical sensibility and antipathy towards Catholicism.

The emergence of Freethought as an alternative to Catholicism divided the Czech-American community into two rival ideological camps, each of which carved out its own institutional and associational sphere within the community. In late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Chicago, Freethinkers and Catholics tended to join different fraternal societies and find social and cultural sustenance and solidarity in different organizations.<sup>26</sup> Each side established its own schools to educate the next generation in accordance with its worldview.<sup>27</sup> These divisions could even continue beyond the grave: in 1877, Chicago’s Bohemian National Cemetery was established as a burial ground for Freethinkers, allegedly because a local priest refused to permit the burial of a non-observant member of his parish in a Catholic cemetery.<sup>28</sup> To be sure, Freethinkers and Catholics managed to co-exist cheek by jowl in the Pilsen neighborhood and other Czech-American enclaves in the city. Nevertheless, there, as elsewhere, the tense, and often inimical, relationship between the two camps “gave an unusual dimension to Czech-American life and determined the development of most of the primary Czech-American institutions.”<sup>29</sup> This social tension would gradually lose its intensity after World War I, though the institutional divisions between the two sides would persist well into the 20th century.<sup>30</sup>

One of the important factors in the rise and maintenance of the division between Freethinkers and Catholics was the Czech-American press. Czech immigrants to the United States had a very high rate of literacy and sought inexpensive reading matter in their native language.<sup>31</sup> Czech-language periodicals – in particular, newspapers – thus became an important channel of

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<sup>24</sup> See Bruce M. Garver, “Czech-American Freethinkers on the Great Plains, 1871-1941”, in *Ethnicity on the High Plains*, ed. by Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 149.

<sup>25</sup> On the variety of religious attitudes within Czech-American Freethought, see Malynne Sternstein, *Czechs of Chicagoland* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 8; Vlha, “Poslední služba”, 332-333.

<sup>26</sup> See Habenicht, *Dějiny Čechův amerických*, 595-599 (Freethought organizations), 622, 635-636, 639, 650-651, 658, 664 (Czech organizations). Cf. Vlha, “Česká komunita ve Spojených státech”, 414.

<sup>27</sup> Marholeva, “Chicagští katolíci a svobodomyšlní Češi”: 76-78.

<sup>28</sup> Nekola, *České Chicago*, 74-75; Vlha, *Mezi starou vlastí a Amerikou*, 264-265

<sup>29</sup> Karel Bicha, *The Czechs in Oklahoma* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 32.

<sup>30</sup> See Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 43; Ivan Dubovický, “Češi v USA - otázka identity (1848-1938)”, *Český lid*, 83, no. 3 (1996): 242; Joseph Slabey Roucek, “The Passing of American Czechoslovaks”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 39, no. 5 (1934): 618, 620-622.

<sup>31</sup> According to a report of the United States Commissioner General of Immigration, the literacy rate for Czech immigrants entering the United States between 1899 and 1909 was approximately 98%; see Thomas Čapek, *Slavs in the United States Census, 1850-1940, with Special Reference to Czechoslovaks* (Chicago: The Czechoslovak National Council of America, 1943), 6. See also Petr Esterka, “Stoleté působení českých otců benediktinů v USA”, *Studie (Křesťanská akademie)*, čís. 108 (1986): 409.

communication, a means of maintaining ethnic identity, and a prime vehicle for the shaping of public opinion among Czech Americans.<sup>32</sup> Freethinkers and Catholics alike sought to make use of the printed word to propagate their views within the Czech-American community. It was the Freethinkers who proved to be especially successful in establishing a strong – indeed, well-nigh hegemonic – presence in the Czech-language press in the United States. In the formative decades between 1860 and 1890, about 90% of Czech-American newspapers espoused Freethought attitudes:<sup>33</sup> preeminent among these was the Chicago-based daily *Svornost* [“Concord”], founded in 1875 and brought out by August Geringer, a bookbinder and -seller turned publisher who would preside, for the next fifty-five years, over a newspaper and book publishing empire that made Chicago a center of Czech-American Freethinking and disseminated Freethought opinion to Czech-Americans throughout the United States.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, Catholics had little representation in the Czech-American press in the 1870s and 1880s. Although there were several short-lived attempts to publish Catholic newspapers in Chicago,<sup>35</sup> they came to naught and the only Catholic newspaper to establish a lasting presence on the market was the St. Louis-based biweekly *Hlas* [“The Voice”], which was founded by Msgr. Josef Hessoun in 1872, but only reached stability, after a false start, in 1874.<sup>36</sup> By the late 1880s, then, Freethought had come to dominate Czech-American print culture and, thereby, to set the tone for thought and sensibility in the Czech-American community.

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<sup>32</sup> On Czech immigrants’ preference for newspapers as reading material, see Kenneth D. Miller *The Czecho-Slovaks in America* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1922), 94; cf. Tomáš Čapek, *Padesát let českého tisku v Americe od vydání “Slowana Amerikánského v Racine, dne 1. ledna 1860 do 1. ledna 1910. S doplňky do začátku 1911* (New York: Správní Radové “Bank of Europe” v New Yorku, 1911), 51-53. On Czech-American periodicals as markers of ethnic and ideological identity, see Marholeva, “Chicagští katoličtí a svobodomyšlní Češi”: 74-75.

<sup>33</sup> Of 122 Czech-American newspapers founded during that period, 110 were secular (primarily Freethought) in orientation, 8 were Catholic, and 4 were Protestant. Figures derived from Čapek, *Padesát let českého tisku v Americe*, 57-58, 82-140; cf. also Bicha, “Settling Accounts”: 48-50; Esterka, “Stoleté působení českých otců”: 409-410.

<sup>34</sup> For overviews of Geringer’s life and activities, see Lenka Procházková & Jaroslav Kříž, “The American Dream in “Czech” Chicago: August Geringer’s Publishing Activities”, *Comenius: Journal of Euro-American Civilization*, 2016, no. 1: 81-95; Miloslav Rechcigl, Jr., *Postavy naší Ameriky: poučné a zábavné čtení ze života zahraničních Čechů*. Praha: Pražská edice, 2000, 145-147.

<sup>35</sup> Most notably, the *Katolické noviny* [“Catholic News”] a weekly newspaper founded by Rev. Josef Molitor in September 1867 which lasted only for nine months, and the *Jednota* [“Union”], a daily newspaper founded by Rev. František Příbyl, which appeared between May and August 1888. The most successful early Catholic newspaper in Chicago was the *Čechoslovan* [“Czech Slav”] a weekly newspaper founded by August Geringer’s brother Jan and Viktorin Keclík in 1883 that, despite some periods of interruption in publishing lasted for twelve years. See Čapek, *Padesát let českého tisku v Americe*, 106-107, 128, 137; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 114. Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 1985, 34; Esterka, “Stoleté působení českých otců”: 409; Rechcigl, Jr., *Postavy naší Ameriky*, 66.

<sup>36</sup> Čapek, *Padesát let českého tisku v Americe*, 110-111. On Msgr. Josef Hessoun, a leading figure in the St. Louis Czech community and in Czech-American Catholicism generally in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Hynek Dostál, “Msgr. Josef Hessoun”, in *Třetí čítanka pro české katolické školy v Americe*, ed. by Sestra M. Víta, O.S.F. (Chicago: Národní svaz českých katolíků, 1934), 413-416; Rechcigl, Jr., *Postavy naší Ameriky*, 65-67.

## Rev. Procopius Neuzil and the Early Years of the Bohemian Benedictine Press (1889-1897)

Such were the cultural headwinds facing the newly ordained Rev. Procopius Neuzil and other Czech-American Catholic clergy in Chicago in the late 1880s. His first years at St. Procopius priory were busy ones. Shortly after his arrival there and a year-and-a-half before ordination, the former schoolmaster proposed that the priory establish a high school to educate poor Czech-American boys and, having received approval from the prior, began teaching a class of two students in March 1887.<sup>37</sup> By September of that year, the school had grown to twenty pupils and now had a faculty of four and, by the spring of 1888, forty-seven students had enrolled.<sup>38</sup> Rev. Neuzil served as both a teacher in, and the principal of, the school, a position that he would hold until 1894.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in the Lenten season of the year following his ordination, he also undertook parochial missions to parishes in St. Paul and New Prague, Minnesota.<sup>40</sup> Such mission trips to Czech-American parishes around the United States would become part of the rhythm of life for him and his confrères in the coming years.<sup>41</sup>

Fittingly, educational concerns provided the initial impetus for what would become the Bohemian Benedictine Press. While still a seminary student, Rev. Neuzil had become acquainted with a weekly Czech children's magazine published in Milwaukee entitled *Besídka dětská* ["Children's bower"].<sup>42</sup> He generally liked the magazine: edited by a schoolmaster, it "included contributions written by children, and ... [gave] them an opportunity to express themselves in the Czech language".<sup>43</sup> However, its secular orientation troubled him, for he thought that Catholic children should have reading material that nurtured and affirmed their religious belief. Rev. Neuzil tried to convince Rev. Josef Hessoun, at that time the publisher of the only major Czech-American Catholic newspaper, to establish a comparable magazine for Czech-American children. Rev. Hessoun, however, suggested that Rev. Neuzil undertake this task itself. After obtaining permission from his prior and making necessary arrangements for supplies and obtaining lists of

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<sup>37</sup> See Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 145-146.

<sup>38</sup> Buresh, *the Procopian Chronicle*, 25-26.

<sup>39</sup> *The American Catholic Who's Who: Volume 7, 1946-1947* (Grosse Pointe, Michigan: Walter Romig, [1947]), 330.

<sup>40</sup> Prokop Neuzil, *Pět a dvacet let práce: zpráva o činnosti českých benediktinů v klášteře sv. Prokopa, Chicago, Ill. od jejich příchodu do Chicaga r. 1885 do r. 1910* (Chicago: [Tiskárna českých benediktinů], [1910]), 12.

<sup>41</sup> Prokop Neuzil, *Pět a dvacet let práce*, 22; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 46; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 112-113.

<sup>42</sup> Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 36. In a speech commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of *Přítel dětí* quoted in extenso in translation by Buresh, Neuzil gave the name as *Dětská besídka* and identified the place of publication as St. Paul. However, the only Czech children's journal with a comparable name published in the 1880s was *Besídka dětská*, published Milwaukee between 1884 and 1886; see Čapek, *Padesát let českého tisku v Americe*, 129. The chief editor of the *Besídka dětská* was Antonín Jurka, a Czech-American schoolteacher living in St. Paul: it thus appears that Neuzil (wrongly) took the home of the editor to be the place of publication. On Jurka, see Esther Jerabek, "Antonin Jurka, a Pioneer Czech Schoolmaster in Minnesota", *Minnesota History*, 13, No. 3 (1932): 269-276.

<sup>43</sup> Jerabek, "Antonin Jurka": 274.



potential subscribers, Rev. Neuzil set to work and, on 21 December 1889, the first issue of the *Přítel dítek* [*“Children’s Friend”*] saw the light of day.<sup>44</sup>

The *Přítel dítek* was an 8-page – soon expanded to 16-page – weekly magazine containing short articles on the basic elements of the Catholic faith, stories, language lessons, riddles, puzzles, and letters to the editor, whose nom de plume was “Uncle” (*Strýček*) (Figure 2).<sup>45</sup> Its production posed no little challenge to Rev. Neuzil, for he was responsible for writing and editing the contents, reviewing corrections, and overseeing the administrative aspects of publication<sup>46</sup> – all work that had to be done in addition to his teaching duties at St. Procopius high school and performing his daily priestly and monastic religious obligations. All of the printing had to be done at an external printing press, for the priory did not possess any printing equipment of its own.<sup>47</sup> This meant that hand setting and composition had to be done at the priory and the finished formes then conveyed to the printer’s establishment – a strenuous process that involved the lifting of heavy frames containing rows of type tied together, which, if dropped, would require resetting all the type anew.<sup>48</sup> Yet, in spite of all the difficulties that work on the *Přítel dítek* entailed, Rev. Neuzil persisted with the enterprise and the young periodical was warmly received by members of the Czech-American reading public: indeed, it gained adult as well as child readers.<sup>49</sup>

For three-and-a-half years, the Czech Benedictines concentrated their publishing activities on the *Přítel dítek* alone. However, adult readers of the magazine kept asking that a supplement be added with content more suitable for them. Although Rev. Neuzil did not think that such an innovation would fit the spirit or original intent of the magazine, he nevertheless printed one issue with a supplement for adult readers. The response was sufficiently positive that Rev. Neuzil decided to turn the supplement into an independent newspaper, and, in short order, the first issue of *Katolík* [*“The Catholic”*] was published in early July 1893.<sup>50</sup> In terms of contents, the new publication included news from the United States, reports about developments in the Czech-American community and the activities of Czech-American Catholic organizations, as well as works of serialized popular fiction.<sup>51</sup> Originally issued as a weekly, *Katolík* found such an enthusiastic reception that, within a matter of weeks, it was

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<sup>44</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 115.

<sup>45</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 115; Esterka, “Stoleté působení českých otců”, 410.

<sup>46</sup> “Ndp. Prokop Neuzil, O.S.B.”: 179.

<sup>47</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 120; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 36. The printing press used was that of Viktorin Keclík and Jan Geringer, publishers of the Catholic weekly newspaper *Čechoslovan*, at 223 West 12<sup>th</sup> Street (cf. n. 35 above).

<sup>48</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 120.

<sup>49</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 115; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 37.

<sup>50</sup> Neuzil, *Pět a dvacet let práce*, 14; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 115; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 37; Lucie Formanová, Jiří Gruntorád, & Michal Přibáň. *Exilová periodika: Katalog periodik českého a slovenského exilu a krajauských tisků vydávaných po roce 1945*. (Praha: Libri prohibiti ; Ježek, 1999), 273, entry 577. These sources differ on the exact date of the first issue: Mizera gives it as 2 July 1893, Buresh as 1 July 1893, and Formanová et al. as 4 July 1893.

<sup>51</sup> Formanová, Gruntorád, & Přibáň, *Exilová periodika*, 273, entry 577.

converted to a biweekly and, after a few months, became a triweekly, a rate of appearance that would continue into the following year.<sup>52</sup>

The year 1894 brought several significant changes to the Benedictine community at St. Procopius Church. In late February, St. Procopius Priory was raised to the status of an abbey and its founding prior, Rev. Nepomucene Jaeger, O.S.B., was named the first abbot of the newly established St. Procopius Abbey: he would be ceremonially installed on 4 July 1894.<sup>53</sup> Earlier in February, the Czech Benedictines took a momentous step in their publishing venture by launching a new daily newspaper. The circumstances that led them to this were the following. By early 1894, the Czech Benedictines had acquired their own press equipment and set up their own printing shop in one of the rooms of an old school building in their parish complex.<sup>54</sup> Now the Panic of 1893 had brought about a general economic downturn in the United States and unemployment in Chicago was high.<sup>55</sup> As word of the new printing shop began to spread, jobless typesetters and printers began to present themselves to the Czech Benedictines, begging for work. In order to accommodate these requests, the Bohemian Benedictine Press took on workers to typeset *Přítel dítek* and *Katolík*, and, moreover, began publishing small books on religious themes, thus creating more opportunities for typesetting work. When this proved insufficient, the decision was made to begin publishing a daily newspaper, while reverting *Katolík* to a biweekly mode of issuance.<sup>56</sup> Although the desire to alleviate unemployment among Czech-American typesetters may have served as the proximate cause for the expansion of the Bohemian Benedictine Press's publishing program, it is likely that another, more general factor played a role as well: namely, the desire to add a counterweight to the continuing dominance of Freethought in Czech-American journalism in Chicago.

On February 8, 1894, the first issue of the daily newspaper *Národ* [*"The Nation"*] was published.<sup>57</sup> The new daily was intended primarily for local circulation in Chicago and, while it shared much of the same content with *Katolík*, it also featured editorials offering sharp, polemical critiques of local Freethought cultural politics and apologetic responses to Freethinkers' attacks upon the Catholic faith.<sup>58</sup> Although an early labor dispute with newly hired typesetters and a concerted effort by Freethought editorial boards to discredit the new newspaper by publicly questioning its economic viability threatened to bring the venture to a rapid end, it survived these initial challenges.<sup>59</sup> To be sure, the finances of the Bohemian Benedictine Press continued to be

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<sup>52</sup> Neužil, *Pět a dvacet let práce*, 14; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 115; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 37; Esterka, "Stoleté působení českých otců": 410.

<sup>53</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 123-124; Neužil, *Pět a dvacet let práce*, 14; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 28.

<sup>54</sup> Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 37.

<sup>55</sup> On the economic situation in Chicago following the Panic of 1893, see Ernest Ludlow Bogart & John Mabry Mathews, *The Modern Commonwealth, 1893-1918* (The Centennial History of Illinois, vol. 5) (Springfield: Illinois Centennial Commission, 1920), 394-403.

<sup>56</sup> On all the above, see Neužil, *Pět a dvacet let práce*, 15; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 116; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 37.

<sup>57</sup> Formanová, Gruntorád, & Přibáň, *Exilová periodika*, 278, entry 591.

<sup>58</sup> For a lively and often amusing sample of some of the polemical wrangling between Catholics and Freethinkers reflected in the editorial pages of the *Národ*, see Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 38-42.

<sup>59</sup> Neužil, *Pět a dvacet let práce*, 14; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 116.

precarious and the editorials of its periodical publications frequently reminded readers of its need for support.<sup>60</sup> This did not stop the Press from inaugurating, in the following year, yet another periodical, an annual almanac featuring a calendar, a potpourri of popular fiction, jokes, and articles on church history, a chronicle summarizing of the previous year's news pertaining to developments in the Czech-American Catholic community, and a directory of Czech-American Catholic parishes and priests in the United States (and, in time, Canada).<sup>61</sup> Entitled *Katolík, českoamerický kalendář* [*The Catholic: A Czech-American Calendar*], this publication not only neatly complemented the Press's newspapers, from which it drew much of its material, but also became, so to speak, an annual *summa* of Czech-American Catholic life.

In 1897, Rev. Procopius Neuzil was named pastor of St. Procopius Parish and so stepped down from his position as director of the Bohemian Benedictine Press, which he had guided since its humble beginnings as a one-man operation in the winter of 1889.<sup>62</sup> His achievement in this position was considerable: he had founded four periodicals that would endure over a number of years, overseen the establishment of a printing works at St. Procopius Priory, and overcome with panache the many administrative challenges associated with establishing and operating a small religious press. His vision, diligence, and perseverance laid the first foundations for what the Czech Benedictines would come to call their "Apostolate of the Press".<sup>63</sup>

## The Bohemian Benedictine Press: Further Developments

Subsequent years saw a further consolidation and expansion of the Bohemian Benedictine Press and its activities. In 1901, St. Procopius Abbey authorized the purchase of two new linotype machines and, two years later, it purchased an additional Miehle press.<sup>64</sup> With these additions, the Press was outgrowing its space in the school building and so, in May and June of 1904, the Abbey purchased lots directly to the north of St. Procopius church on which to build a new printing plant.<sup>65</sup> Construction on the plant began in May of following year and the new printery, located at 696 (later: 1637) Allport Street, commenced its operations in the autumn of 1905.<sup>66</sup> By 1910, the printing, publishing, and distributing operations of the Bohemian Benedictine Press had taken on a considerable amplitude: its director, one of the priests of St. Procopius Abbey, oversaw a workforce that included six lay brothers of the Abbey,<sup>67</sup> and a number of laymen, namely five

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<sup>60</sup> Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 38-39.

<sup>61</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 117; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 40.

<sup>62</sup> Droba, *Czech and Slovak Leaders*, 142; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 43; Habenicht, *Dějiny Čechův amerických*, 628.

<sup>63</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 114, 118; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 31.

<sup>64</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 114; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 43. For a description and illustration of the Miehle press, which had been invented by a Chicago pressman, Robert Miehle in the early 1880s, see "The Miehle, Two Revolution Cylinder Machine", Press Gallery, Letterpress Printing in the 1960's. Accessed February 14, 2021 at: <http://letterpressprinting.com.au/page24.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> Neuzil, *Pět a dvacet let práce*, 14; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 120.

<sup>66</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 121.

<sup>67</sup> Lay brothers were members of the Abbey who had professed religious vows but had not been ordained as priests. Following monastic tradition, they typically took on practical tasks, often involving manual labor,

editors, four clerks and accountants, six machine typesetters, two hand typesetters, one foreman for the typesetters, two printers at the printing press, six other handyman assistants, and twelve newspaper distributors.<sup>68</sup>

This material expansion reflected an increase in the Bohemian Benedictine Press's printing and publishing activities. For one thing, the Press continued to add to its repertoire of periodicals. In 1898, it began publishing *Hospodářské noviny* [*The Husbandman's News*], a biweekly magazine that sought to present agricultural news shorn free of Freethought editorializing, which would continue in existence until 1930.<sup>69</sup> The press also began publishing periodicals of a more explicitly religious character. In 1901, it published the inaugural issue of *Apoštolát modlitby* [*The Apostolate of Prayer*], the Czech-language edition of the monthly organ of the Apostolate of Prayer, a Jesuit-sponsored devotional organization.<sup>70</sup> This small magazine would continue to appear for a quarter of a century until, in 1926, it was absorbed into a new monthly entitled *Vůdce* [*The Leader*], which would continue in print until 1966.<sup>71</sup> A shorter-lived venture was the quarterly *Vezmi a čti* [*Take and Read*], which likewise sought to provide inspirational spiritual reading to the layman. Begun in 1914, it lapsed in 1918, though elements of its contents were reintroduced in *Vůdce*.<sup>72</sup> There were, to be sure, limits to expansion: 1926, the year in which *Vůdce* was launched, also saw an abortive attempt to create a new monthly entitled *Český povídkář* [*The Czech Storyteller*], a "conspicuously nonreligious" magazine aimed at a Czech-American audience extending beyond Catholics that lasted only five issues.<sup>73</sup> Even as the Press expanded its publishing profile, the four original publications founded by Rev. Neuzil – *Přítel dětí*, *Katolík*, *Národ*, and *Katolík, česko-americký kalendář* – continued to form the core of its periodical publishing.

In addition to its periodicals, the Bohemian Benedictine Press developed a substantial program of book and pamphlet publishing. Already in the 1890s, it had begun to publish educational literature for Catholic Czech-language schools, such as catechisms and school textbooks.<sup>74</sup> By the first decades of the twentieth century, it had expanded its remit to cover "Czech-language devotional leaflets and pamphlets, hymnals and catechisms, readers and grammars."<sup>75</sup> By the late 1920s and early 1930s, The Press had even begun to venture into limited publication of English-language texts.<sup>76</sup> A "full book catalog" (*úplný seznam knih*) issued by the Press in 1928 bears eloquent witness to the range of materials that it was

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that would provide for the upkeep of the Abbey. For a profile of the lay brothers at St. Procopius and their activities over the years, see Prokop Neuzil, *Bratři laikové v řádu sv. Benedikta* (Chicago: Tiskárna českých benediktinů, 1926); James Flint, "The Builders of the Community: The Lay Brother Vocation at St. Procopius Abbey", *The American Benedictine Review*, 55, no. 4 (2004): 395-441.

<sup>68</sup> Neuzil, *Pět a dvacet let práce*, 31; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 43.

<sup>69</sup> Neuzil, *Pět a dvacet let práce*, 16; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 116-117. According to Mizera, the initiative for the foundation of this magazine came from Rev. Neuzil, whose own past experiences as an agricultural laborer presumably made him sensitive to the needs of farmers.

<sup>70</sup> Formanová, Gruntorád, & Přibán, *Exilová periodika*, 309, entry 663; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 117.

<sup>71</sup> Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 74; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 117. Mizera incorrectly gives 1921 as the date of the inaugural issue of *Vůdce*.

<sup>72</sup> Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 74.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>74</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 117-118.

<sup>75</sup> Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 43.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.



publishing at the time.<sup>77</sup> Covering no fewer than 95 pages, it lists Czech-language prayer books, religious literature (*nábožné spisy*), devotional booklets, apologetic works and tracts for the times (*apologetické spisy a časové úvahy*), novels and short stories, children's books, schoolbooks, musical scores and song books, literature for the household and the farm (*spisy pro domácnost a hospodářství*), and dramatic works, as well as a modest assortment of English-language prayer books, textbooks, and novels. This variegated book publishing program was an important complement to the Bohemian Benedictine Press's core mission of periodical publication and assured its position as the single most important American provider of Czech-language religious literature for Czech-American Catholics in the early twentieth century – a position that it would continue to hold long after the cultural squabbles between Freethinkers and Catholics had become a dead letter in Czech-American society.

## Procopius Neuzil's Further Contributions to Catholic Czech-American Print Culture

The years following Rev. Procopius Neuzil's departure from the directorship of the Bohemian Benedictine Press brought new and demanding tasks for him and his community. In addition to taking on the pastoral administration of St. Procopius Church in 1897, which he would hold until 1914, Rev. Neuzil was named prior of St. Procopius Abbey in 1899, a position in which he would serve for twenty years.<sup>78</sup> He played a leading role in planning for the move of the high school that he had founded at St. Procopius Parish – now known as St. Procopius College – to a new campus in Lisle, Illinois, some twenty-five miles to the west of Chicago, as well as in establishing a new charitable institution, St. Joseph's Orphanage, also located in Lisle.<sup>79</sup> In 1901, St. Procopius College was moved to Lisle and, in 1914, the Abbey was transferred there as well, though the Czech Benedictine priests serving St. Procopius Parish and the lay brothers working at the Press continued to live on the original monastic premises on South Allport Street.<sup>80</sup> After finishing his term as pastor of St. Procopius Church, Rev. Neuzil assumed teaching and administrative duties at St. Procopius College in Lisle, where he also oversaw a seminary associated with the college.<sup>81</sup> In 1919 and 1920, he led a nine-month long mission to the newly formed state of Czechoslovakia organized by the Chicago-based National Alliance of Czech Catholics and, in the early 1920s, raised funds for the construction of a new seminary in Rome for Czech priests, the Nepomucenum, an activity for which he would be awarded the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* medal by Pope Pius XI in

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<sup>77</sup> *Tiskárny českých benediktinů úplný seznam knih obsahující modlitební knížky, knihy obsahu náboženského, romány povídky, knihy apologetické, učebnice, školní knihy, hudebniny atd.* (Chicago: Bohemian Benedictine Press, 1928).

<sup>78</sup> *The American Catholic Who's Who: Volume 7, 1946-1947*, 330.

<sup>79</sup> For accounts of the transfer of St. Procopius College from Chicago to Lisle, see Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 148-150; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 47-50. This educational institution would, in time, develop into what is today Benedictine University. On St. Joseph Orphanage, which commenced operation in 1899 and continued to function until 1956, see Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 151-157; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 48-49.

<sup>80</sup> Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 56.

<sup>81</sup> *The American Catholic Who's Who: Volume 7, 1946-1947*, 330.

1928.<sup>82</sup> In 1927, Rev. Neuzil was named prior for a second time and, ten years later, on 31 March 1937, was elected third Abbot of St. Procopius Abbey, a position that he would hold from his installation on 5 July 1937 until his death on 2 December 1946.<sup>83</sup>

Despite the manifold pastoral and administrative activities claiming his attention, Rev. Neuzil continued to contribute to Czech-American print culture in various ways over the final half-century of his life. He continued to publish articles in *Katolík* and *Národ* and, in the 1930s, resumed limited editorial duties for the *Přítel dětí* and *Národ*.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, he authored a number of books published by the Benedictine Bohemian Press. Given his background as a schoolteacher, it is unsurprising that the earliest of these appears to have been a *Mluvnice pro české školy v Americe* [*Grammar for Czech Schools in America*], most probably published in the late 1890s or the very first years of the twentieth century.<sup>85</sup> Another volume was devoted to chronicling the history of St. Procopius Abbey. Published in 1910, *Pět a dvacet let práce: zpráva o činnosti českých benediktinů v klášteře sv. Prokopa, Chicago, Ill. od jejich příchodu do Chicaga r. 1885 do r. 1910* [*Twenty-Five Years of Work: A Report on the Activities of the Czech Benedictines in St. Procopius Monastery, Chicago, Illinois, from their Arrival in Chicago in 1885 until 1910*] gives a year-by-year account of the origins and early history of the Czech Benedictine order, culminating in a minute description of its twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Rev. Neuzil chronicled the activities of St. Procopius Church, while serving as pastor there, in several yearbooks issued between 1906 and 1912.<sup>87</sup> Other volumes, written to recruit new members for the Abbey, featured vignettes of the lives of the community's lay brothers: *Bratři laikové v řádu sv. Benedikta* [*Lay Brothers in the Order of St. Benedict*], which appeared in 1926, and *Řeholní bratři a naše doba* [*Monastic Brothers and Our Times*], published in 1932.<sup>88</sup> Finally, one should not pass over his religious books, which included a biography of the founder of his order, St. Benedict of Nursia, also published in 1932 (Figure 3),<sup>89</sup> and various religious pamphlets of a devotional nature, one of which, *Devítidenní pobožnost ku svaté Terezii od dítky Ježíše a nejsv. obličejě Páně* [*Nine-day Devotion to St. Theresa of the Child Jesus and the Most Holy Face of the Lord*], went through no fewer than three editions in 1927 and 1928.<sup>90</sup> The various subjects of these books

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<sup>82</sup> *Třetí čítanka pro české katolické školy v Americe*, 396-398, 439.

<sup>83</sup> *The American Catholic Who's Who: Volume 7, 1946-1947*, 330; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 88. "Třetí opat kláštera sv. Prokopa, Jeho Milost nejdůst. P. Prokop Neuzil", *Katolík: Česko-Americký kalendář*, 44 (1948): 201, 204.

<sup>84</sup> So Droba, *Czech and Slovak Leaders*, 142: "Since 1930 he [sci., Rev. Neuzil] has been in charge of the Editorial Department in the Sunday edition of the "Národ" and of the "Přítel Dětek" since 1931."

<sup>85</sup> Esther Jerabek, *Czechs and Slovaks in North America: A Bibliography* (New York/Chicago: Czechoslovak Society of Arts & Sciences in America, Inc./Czechoslovak National Council of America, 1976), 122, entry 2238. This volume, which contains elementary grammatical lore and a number of exercises, is undated but its typeface and the lack of a street address for the Bohemian Benedictine Press, a regular feature of its post-1905 imprints, strongly suggest an early date. Jerabek tentatively dates it in the 1890s.

<sup>86</sup> Jerabek, *Czechs and Slovaks*, 279, entry 5659.

<sup>87</sup> Jerabek, *Czechs and Slovaks*, 279, entry 5658.

<sup>88</sup> Jerabek, *Czechs and Slovaks*, 279, entries 5656, 5660.

<sup>89</sup> Title: *Svatý Benedikt: učitel, apoštol a vůdce* [*Saint Benedict: Teacher, Apostle, and Leader*]; see Jerabek, *Czechs and Slovaks*, 279, entry 5662.

<sup>90</sup> Jerabek, *Czechs and Slovaks*, 279, entries 5657, 5661.

neatly mirror Rev. Neuzil's experience as an educator, a missionary, and a committed member of a religious community.

In the 1930s, Rev. Neuzil turned his writing and editorial skills to a new field of endeavor. From the time of the Russian Revolution, he had been interested in the possibility of preparing priests for missionary work in Russia and, to this end, had undertaken the study of the Russian language.<sup>91</sup> This interest proved prescient for, in 1924, Pope Pius XI issued an appeal to the Benedictine order to "prepare themselves for missions in Russia".<sup>92</sup> Three years later, after all due deliberation, St. Procopius Abbey chose to commit itself to working for missions in Russia and fostering church unity among Roman Catholics, Eastern Rite Catholics, and Russian Orthodox believers, and Rev. Neuzil was appointed by his abbot to direct this work.<sup>93</sup> For the next nineteen years, he oversaw a number of initiatives to prepare members of the Abbey for the promotion of ecumenical rapprochement between Western and Eastern rite Christians. Here, again, he did not fail to make use of publication as a means of furthering his program.<sup>94</sup> In April 1936, Rev. Neuzil commenced publishing a new monthly journal in Russian and English entitled *Tserkovnyi Golos, or, Voice of the Church*, to promote the cause of church unity, serving as its editor until it suspended publication a month before his death in 1946.<sup>95</sup> He also prepared a small bilingual Russian-English catechism that was published in 1937,<sup>96</sup> which one contemporary reviewer described as "in substance [the] Baltimore Catholic Catechism with such changes as were absolutely necessary in order to adapt the truths taught by the Baltimore Catechism to the concept and manner of expression of the Eastern Rite."<sup>97</sup> Funded by the Catholic Church Extension, this slight booklet was to be distributed to Russian Orthodox children free of charge. In his ecumenical activities, as in so much else, Rev. Neuzil relied on the printed word to propagate the messages that he wished to send.

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<sup>91</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 224; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 85.

<sup>92</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 225; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 86.

<sup>93</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 225-226; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 86.

<sup>94</sup> For an overview of these, see Klaud Viktorka, "Unionistická práce opatství sv. Prokopa", in *První unionistický sjezd ve Spojených státech konaný ve dnech 28. až září L.P. 1956 v opatství sv. Prokopa v Lisle, Illinois* (Chicago: Tiskárna českých benediktinů, 1957), 16-23; Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 223-231; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 85-93.

<sup>95</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 230; Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 89; *The American Catholic Who's Who: Volume 7, 1946-1947*, 330. Viktorka, "Unionistická práce", incorrectly gives the inaugural date as 1935 and the date of cessation as 1949. *Tserkovnii Golos* would later be revived in 1957 as a newsletter and would definitively cease publication in December 1965. It should be noted that this periodical was printed not at the Bohemian Benedictine Press's facilities on South Allport Street in Chicago but in a smaller auxiliary printing shop which had been set up at St. Procopius Abbey in Lisle and continued in operation until 1945; see Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 109.

<sup>96</sup> Procopius Neuzil, *A Short Russian-English Catechism of Christian Doctrine = Kratkii russko-angliiskii katikjizis' khristianskago ucheniia*. ([Chicago]: Catholic Church Extension Society of the United States of America, 1937); cf. Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 89.

<sup>97</sup> "Book Notes", in *The Ecclesiastical Review* 49, no. 2 (1938), 93.

## Epilogue: An Enduring Legacy

The Bohemian Benedictine Press had never been money-making proposition for St. Procopius Abbey and, even during its heyday, its finances were insecure at best.<sup>98</sup> From the late 1920s on, as new immigration restrictions reduced the flow of newcomers from Czechoslovakia and the younger generations of Czech-Americans increasingly followed the path of linguistic assimilation and Americanization, the market for Czech-language publications in the United States began to contract. This, of course, led to financial difficulties for Czech-American presses, and the Bohemian Benedictine Press proved to be no exception. As subscriptions slipped, the Press sought various means to retain readers. One solution was to incorporate English text into the publications: in 1934, the Sunday edition of *Národ* began to be issued with a one-page English supplement, the *Catholic Worker Page*, which was expanded five years later into a twelve-page tabloid with the title *Národ: Sunday English Section*.<sup>99</sup> Another was to stop publishing periodicals that had lost a critical mass of subscribers: at the end of 1947, a year after Rev. Neuzil's death, one of the four core publications, *Přítel dětí* was discontinued, with some of its features being transferred to a new children's section in *Katolík*.<sup>100</sup> The pace of publication of other flagship journals also slowed down: in 1954, the *Katolík*, formerly a semiweekly newspaper, became a weekly and the *Národ*, formerly a daily, became a semiweekly.<sup>101</sup> In the late 1960s, as subscriptions continued to drop and other means of making up the Press's budgetary shortfalls failed, the decision was gradually made to wind down the press.<sup>102</sup> The final issue of the annual almanac, which had been renamed *Národ* in 1950,<sup>103</sup> was for the year 1974; the two remaining newspapers, *Katolík* and *Národ*, published their final issues on 19 December and 20 December 1975, respectively, some eighteen years after their former Freethought rival, *Svornost*, had ceased publication.<sup>104</sup>

This, however, is not quite yet the end of the story. After the shuttering of the Bohemian Benedictine Press in 1975, another Czech Benedictine missionary, Rev. Vojtěch Vít, O.S.B., resolved to continue the tradition of Catholic Czech-language publishing in Chicago inaugurated by Rev. Procopius Neuzil eighty-six years previously.<sup>105</sup> On 3 January 1976, he began publishing

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<sup>98</sup> Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 74.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 110. See, however, Formanová, Gruntorád, & Příbáň, *Exilová periodika*, 273, entry 577 & 278, entry 591, who claim that *Katolík* was still a semiweekly in 1961. They also state that *Národ* joined *Katolík* as a weekly publication in 1960.

<sup>102</sup> Buresh, *The Procopian Chronicle*, 110.

<sup>103</sup> Mizera, *Czech Benedictines*, 117.

<sup>104</sup> Formanová, Gruntorád, & Příbáň, *Exilová periodika*, 301-302, entry 643.

<sup>105</sup> Dušan Hladík, "Přežije Hlas národa rok 2000?", *Hlasý Národa*, 2000, no. 0: 3. On the life of Fr. Vít, see "Vojtěch Jaroslav Vít OSB", Město Police nad Metují [website], accessed May 14, 2021 at: <https://www.police.cz/zivot-ve-meste/historie-mesta/vyznamne-osobnosti-police-a-policka/vojtech-jaroslav-vit-osb/>. According to Formanová, Gruntorád, & Příbáň, *Exilová periodika*, 273, entry 577 & 278, entry 591, Rev. Vít was involved in the production of *Katolík* and *Národ* during the final years of their existence.



a new weekly newspaper under the aegis of the Czech-American Heritage Center Velehrad.<sup>106</sup> The new periodical's name – *Hlas národa* [*“Voice of the Nation”*] – ingeniously evoked the past of Czech-American Catholic publishing by invoking the names of two of the most successful newspapers that had emerged from that milieu – the St.-Louis-based *Hlas* and the Chicago-based *Národ*. Like its predecessors, it presented news from the United States and the world, though with greater emphasis on Czechoslovak affairs, reports about life in the Czech-American community, religious and historical articles, and letters to the editor: however, it was somewhat more linguistically diverse, with contributions in Czech, Slovak, and English.<sup>107</sup> Converted into a biweekly in 1993, *Hlas národa* continued in operation until the turn of the millennium, when a convergence of financial and administrative crises caused it to cease publication.<sup>108</sup> Yet even so, the tradition did not lapse, for another Czech-American priest, Rev. Dušan Hladík, director of the Czech Catholic Mission in Chicago, stepped into the breach and began publishing a new biweekly under the title *Hlasy národa*, or, *Voices of the Nation*, in the fall of 2000, with articles in Czech and English.<sup>109</sup> This magazine, which has since become a monthly, is still in existence today: as of mid-May 2021, it is the only Czech-language periodical still published in the United States. In this lone survivor of the once abundant Czech-American ethnic press, the legacy of the dedicated and indefatigable Rev. Procopius Neuzil lives on, even if in indirect and attenuated form.

## Acknowledgements

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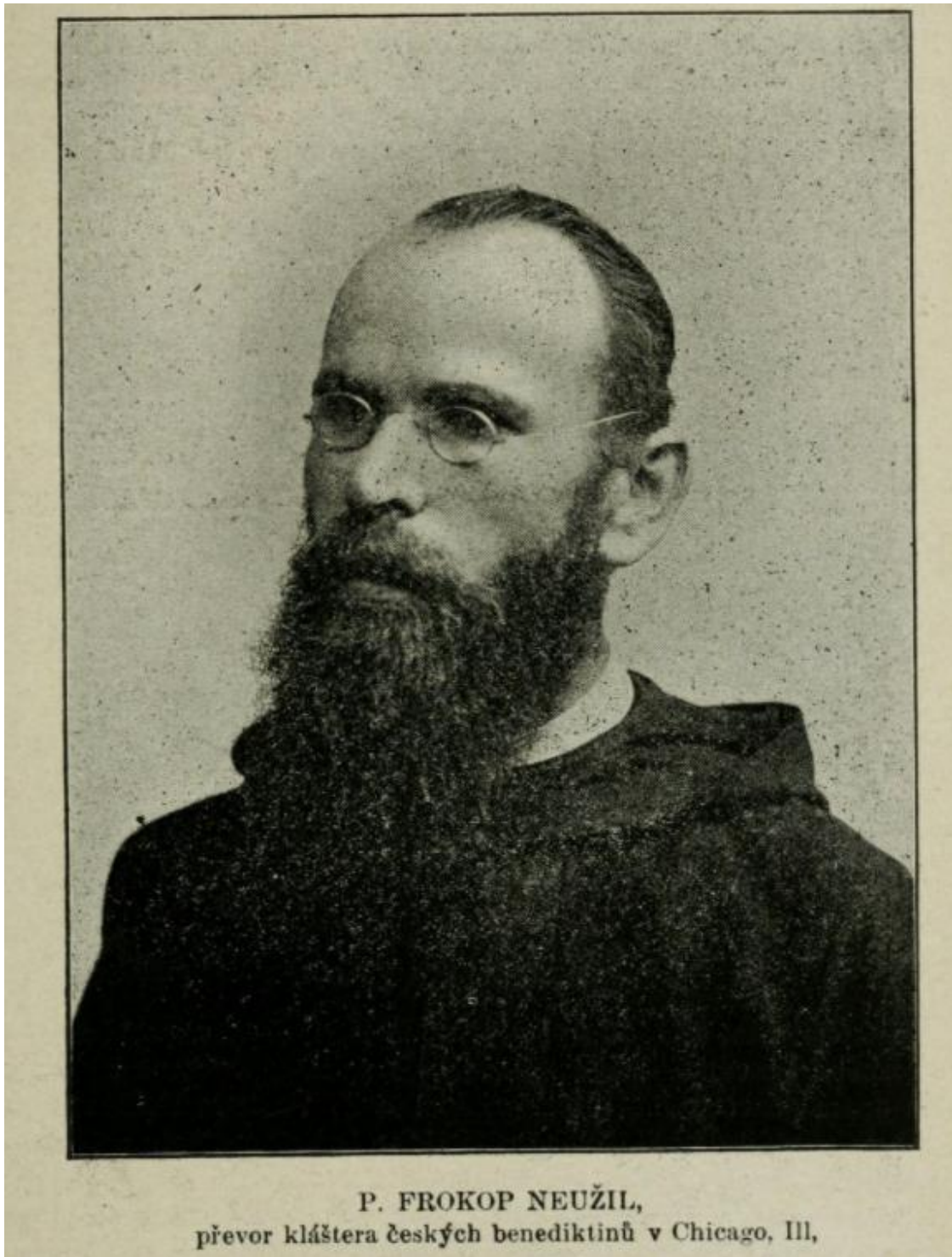
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<sup>106</sup> Formanová, Gruntorád, & Příbáň, *Exilová periodika*, 267, entry 562, *pace* “Vojtěch Jaroslav Vít OSB”, whose anonymous author inaccurately assumes that Rev. Vít's newspaper was still published by the Bohemian Benedictine Press. *Hlas národa* continued to be published in Chicago until late 1988, when Velehrad moved its base of operations to Cicero.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Hladík, “Přežije Hlas národa rok 2000?": 3.

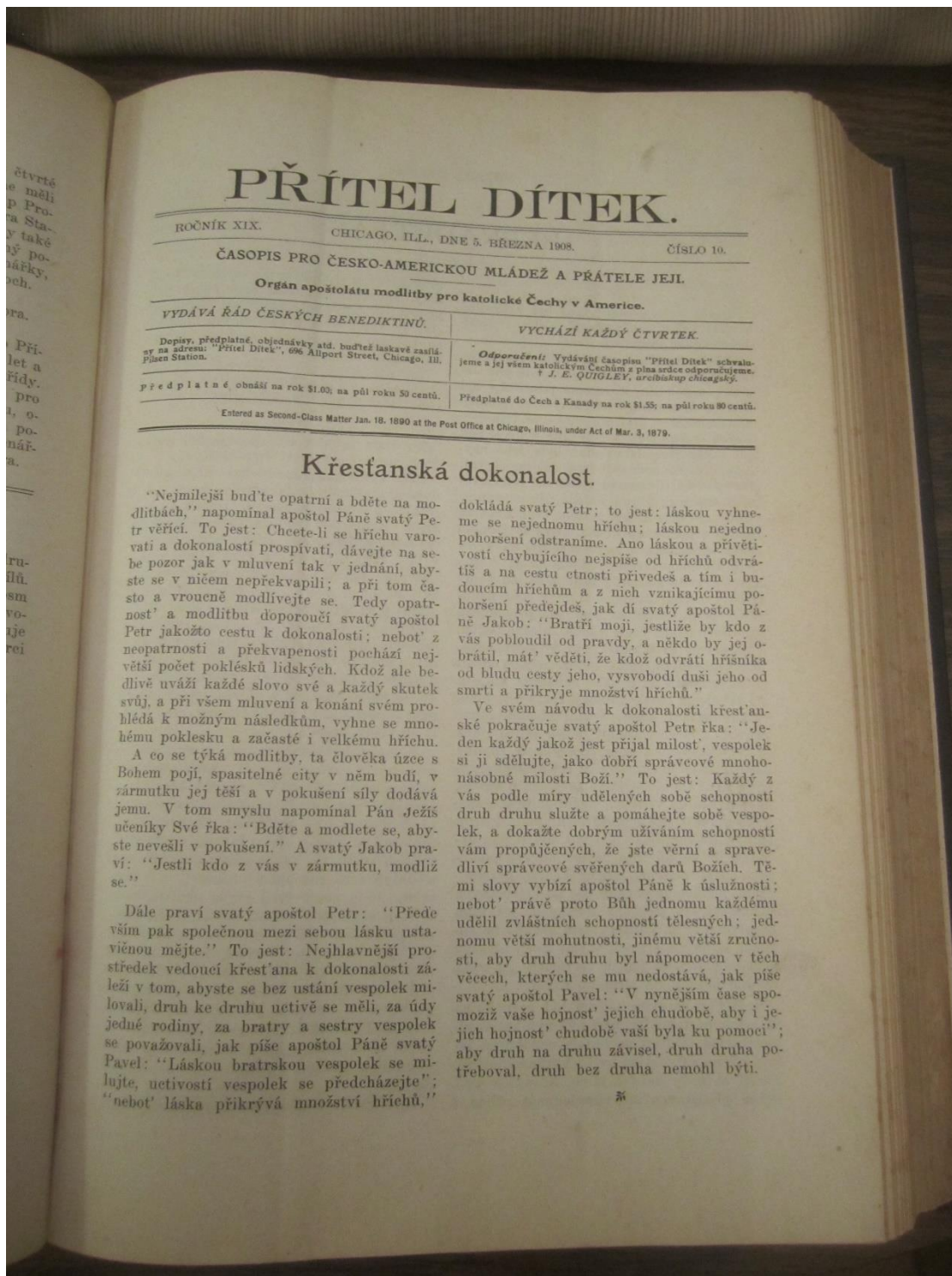
<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*



Rev. Procopius Neuzil, O.S.B. (1861-1947), Founder of the Bohemian Benedictine Press

(Source: Jan Habenicht, *Dějiny Čechův amerických* [St. Louis: Hlas, 1910], 628,

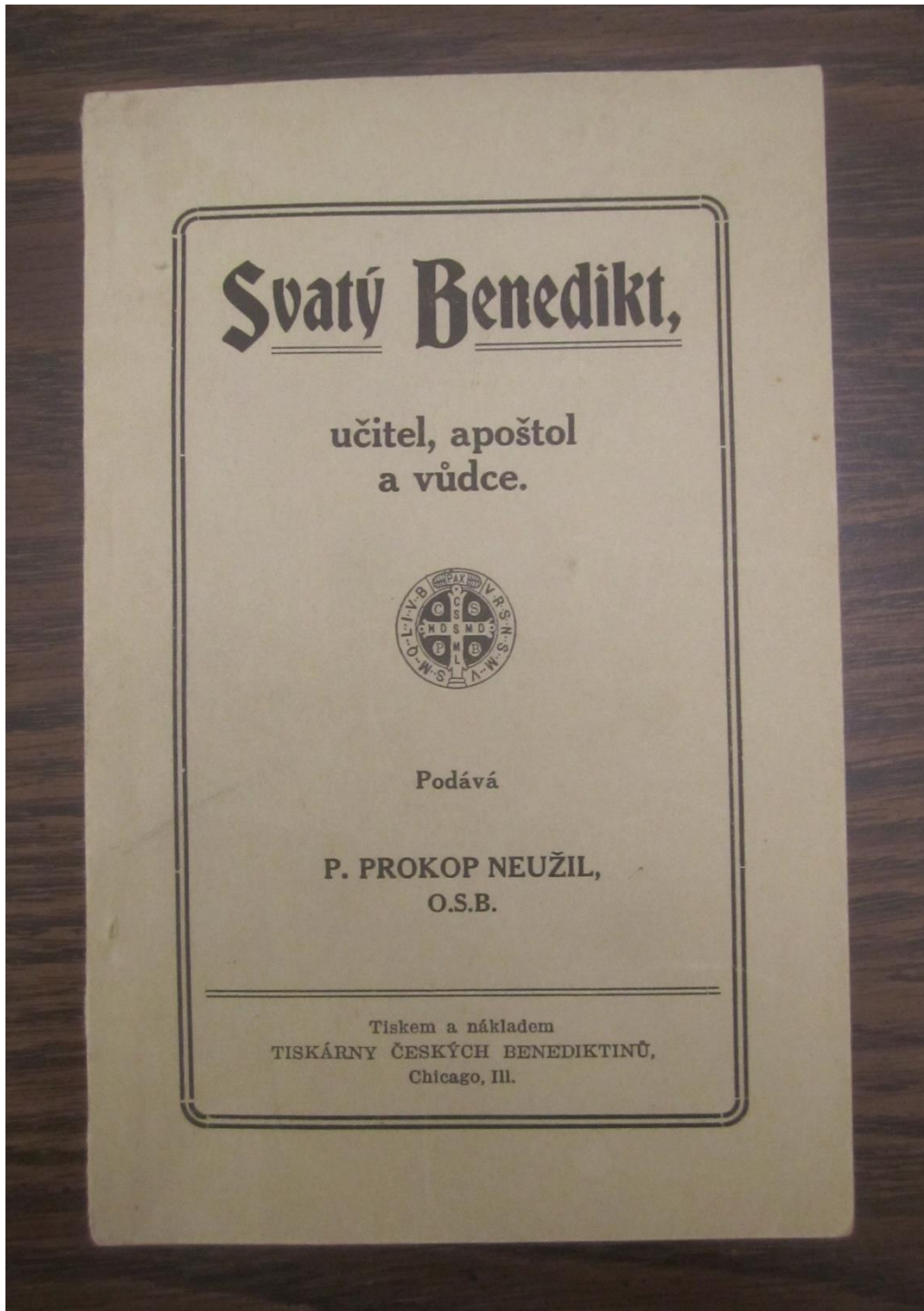
via <https://archive.org/details/dejinycechuvameroohabe>)



*Přítel dítek*: First page of Vol. 19, No. 10 (5 March 1908)

(Source: Thomas M. Dousa, Personal Collection)





Procopius Neuzil, *Svatý Benedikt: učitel, apoštol a vůdce*  
(Chicago: Tiskárna českých benediktinů, 1926), Front cover  
(Source: Thomas M. Dousa, Personal Collection)