

Chapter 1

1645-1774-1918

1645-1774-1853

By family tradition, handed down by word of mouth from one generation to another, we came to Těšany from Bohemia. This may have been in the second half of the 17th century. According to a document in the Brno state archives, the settlement of Těšany, with its lands and seven inhabitants, was handed over to the Dominican monastery in Brno on 15 April 1666 for 2,000 Moravian gold pieces. Again according to the state archives, Těšany had been set on fire by the Swedes on 4 October 1645, and had been burnt again in 1663. After 1666, settlers arrived to occupy the deserted village.

The first Rychlík to appear in the Těšany record book was Matouš Rychlík in 1774. I discovered from the church registry that he was one of our ancestors, and that he lived and farmed at No. 18. He was the father of Cyril Rychlík, of whom we know by family tradition.

In 1797, Cyril Rychlík married Anna Mandeliková daughter of Jiří Mandelik, another whose name is to be found in the Těšany record book. In an old land register in the regional archives in Brno, there is an entry that on 21 September 1797 Jiří Mandelik gave No. 100 to his daughter Anna and her husband Cyril Rychlík. The houses from No. 85 to No. 100 had been built at the same time, lots being drawn for places. Our ancestors drew No. 100, where there was a large pit which had apparently been caused by digging for gypsum. The lords of the manor decreed that those who drew the better places should each give 100 unfired bricks to those who drew places with pits, and everyone honoured this to the dot. In addition to a building plot, everyone received a seven-measure field.

We do not know how many siblings Cyril had, but it appears from an entry in the record book that he had at least one brother. This entry recorded that in 1802 a fire started at No. 16 and destroyed several houses on each side, among those burnt out being Josef Rychlík. We judge from this that at No. 18 was Cyril's brother. Cyril, after his marriage, may have continued to live at No. 18 while he was building No. 100, because according to the church registry a son Florian was born on 16 December 1799 to Cyril and Anna at No. 18.

Cyril was a carpenter and went out to work, and his wife ran the smallholding. According to family tradition she was very charitable, to the detriment of her own household, and her husband had to put a brake on it. When Anna baked bread (in those days, everyone baked bread at home in their own ovens), Cyril did not go to work until she had rolled out the bread and put it into the straw containers that were used for baking, so that he knew how many loaves there would be. But Anna fooled her husband. When she put the loaves in the oven, she took a little dough from each, and this gave her an extra loaf for someone who was in need. And one year they had a good crop of lentils, and when Cyril had threshed them he filled a two-hogshead (112 litre) wine barrel with them and stored them for the winter. When he came to use them, he found the barrel empty. He went back and asked Anna where they had got to. "Cyril, dear, the mice got them." Cyril was very angry, because he knew that mice could not get lentils out of a closed barrel, but knowing his wife he realised that she had given them away. He was so angry that he took a strap to her, but perhaps she did not make too much of this because she said, "Cyril, dear, you drive one devil out of me, and two come back in."

After Florian, Cyril and Anna had more children, but these died in infancy and Florian remained alone. Florian married twice. His first wife was Marie Putnova, who died childless. His second wife was Marie Jindřichovská from No. 63, who had been born in 1808. Marie was tall and slender, with black eyes and black hair. She married Florian under pressure from her parents, who saw a good match for their daughter in a childless widower with fields and a house. Florian was a very good fellow, she soon got used to him, and they lived very contentedly. On 31 October 1838 they had a son František, but when František was ten years old his father died. His widow remarried in 1849, to childless widower Ignáce Rychlík of No. 76, and they had two children, a daughter Marie born on 13 October 1850, and a son Josef on 24 June 1853. These were František's half-sister and half-brother, and were nicknamed "Marinka and Pepek".

1861-1887

In 1861, František married Františka Vahalová, daughter of Tobiáš Vahala of No. 82. She had been born in 1840. František was of medium height, strong, with an elongated face, blue eyes, and black

hair. Františka was tall and thin, with black eyes and black hair. She could read and write well, which in those days not everyone could. These were the parents of our father, and hence our grandfather and grandmother. Grandmother had a very good memory, and what we know by family tradition we know from her.

On 11 November 1863, they had a daughter Karolina. That year was very dry, with no rain from spring until autumn, and the potatoes grew no bigger than hazelnuts. And in June 1866 there was a frost, and when the rye grains were half formed it was scorched by the frost and had to be cut at once. In these years there was much want, and people went as far as the mill at Vojkovice to buy bread and flour. [Vojkovice is on the Svratka, the main river running south from Brno, and so presumably had a better supply of water than the local mills, but it is some dozen kilometres from Těšany and the journey on roads still unmetalled will have taken two hours or more each way. The first Těšany record book notes an even worse drought in 1842, when people had to go as far as the Danube at Vienna to find a mill that was working.]

According to grandmother, life was not easy. They had a total of nine measures of land. The seven measures associated with No. 100 were inherited by grandfather from his father Florian, and grandmother had two measures elsewhere. They had one cow, for which she carried baskets of grass from spring to winter. She went for the grass at 3 o'clock, before daybreak, and had to be home with the baskets before the herdsman blew his horn to gather the herd. At that time, clover hay was not sown, the common lands were almost all grazing lands, and each year the fields in certain sectors were left fallow. So, for example, one year such-and-such a sector lay fallow, the next year so-and-so, until each had taken its turn. These fallow sectors were grazed from spring onwards by cattle, goats, and pigs, and a herdsman looked after them. And not only did she have to collect grass, but she had to feed the animals and cook breakfast, because when the herdsman blew his horn the cattle were driven into the herd, and people went to a tract-holder's to work.

Grandmother and grandfather worked as threshers at Pavel Buček's at No. 42. At that time, each tract-holder had four threshers, that is four householders with their wives. The tract-holder ploughed their little fields for them with his horses, and in return for one day's work with the horses they gave him five days of work together, or one of them gave him ten days. In those days there were no machines nor even scythes, and the corn was reaped using sickles. It was then threshed using flails, and throughout the winter people worked threshing. Winnowing machines were similarly non-existent, the threshed corn was laid out on the barn floor and stirred up, and the wind took away the chaff. The clean corn was then divided into measures, and every tenth measure was given to the threshers in return for their work.

Clothing was very hard-wearing, and was handed down from father to son and from mother to daughter. People wore yellow or black leather trousers, high boots, and short jackets with a thick row of shiny buttons. The jackets were worn unbuttoned so as to show red, blue, or green waistcoats, and these also had a thick row of shiny buttons, richly embroidered and buttoned up to the neck. In winter, they wore fur coats. Men wore long unlined fur coats, the skin was yellow on the outside, and inside was a long sheepskin. The only shirts worn were of white linen, some richly embroidered for festivals. For everyday wear they had stout cotton trousers and blue or brown fustian jackets.

The women's festival costume was very gaily coloured. They wore skirts sewn from seven widths of 80cm cloth, the underskirts from starched linen, the outer skirts from fine muslin and gaily coloured cotton. Aprons were richly embroidered, and likewise gloves and collars. They wore red stockings, and on their heads great neckerchiefs, folded over into a triangle and wrapped around the face with little horns at the top pointing sideways.

On 22 January 1868, grandmother and grandfather had a son, who was christened Tobiáš after grandmother's father. In his youth he was pale and weak and grandmother was afraid that he would die, so she went with him to various women who collected herbs and warded off illnesses. When he got no better, she took him to the doctor at Sokolnice. The doctor examined him and said that he would never grow up, because he had only a small part of his lungs. Then he gave her some medicine for him, and she went home in tears. When she got home, she boiled up some herbs, and made the boy drink some tea with the doctor's medicine. But perhaps the boy greatly disliked the medicine, because when her back was turned he poured it out of the window. After that she cooked for him as best she could, so that as long as he was in the world he would be happy. But the boy did not die, he got over his illness, and was as healthy as a fish.

In 1874, the row of houses including No. 100 burned down. The fire started at the Horáks' at No. 101, where pancakes were being fried for lunch. In those days, houses had wide chimneys which

occupied nearly a quarter of the living room. At the bottom was the oven for baking bread, and above the oven door was a small door to the chimney, about the size of a small window. The cooking was done in this open chimney, at the bottom of which was a griddle, a cast-iron plate 40cm x 40cm with four feet 20cm to 25cm high. The fire burned under this griddle, and the cooking and frying was done on it. On this occasion the mistress of the house was frying pancakes, a splash of hot fat caught her, the fire leapt up through the chimney and fell on the thatched roof around it, and the roof was immediately in flames. The westerly wind fanned the flames, which quickly spread along the thatched roofs. To stop the fire, people tore down the roof of No. 108. In all, 23 houses were burnt out. After the fire, the sufferers remade their roofs with brick tiles instead of straw thatch. [This fire is the subject of the final entry in the first Těšany record book, the houses being listed in order as 101, 106, 140, 85-100, 102-105, and then 108.]

In 1876, a fire broke out next door at No. 102, Jan Bartušek's, and spread to No. 100. Thus our grandparents were burnt out for a second time in two years. This time the fire also took the waggon, the plough, and other things which were standing under the shed. The householders were in the fields, and so could not save anything. This was a very serious blow, because they hadn't increased the insurance after the first fire, and so they received only the same thatched-roof payment as two years before. They still hadn't paid off the debt resulting from the first fire, and now they had to borrow afresh. According to grandmother, if there was a series of bad years, people went into debt. Woe to him who went to borrow from a Jew, because a Jew did not lend except on mortgage, and if the debtor could not repay after the specified time the Jew pursued him through the courts. In those days tracts and half-tracts of land were indivisible, so if a tract-holder had more than one child he could only give his tract or half-tract to one of them, and the recipient then paid the others something. If someone was in debt to a Jew and the Jew took him before the court, his tract or half-tract was sold to the Jew for perhaps only 500 gold pieces, and he could not sell off one piece of a field in order to keep the rest. And so, in the 1880s, many local tract-holders lost the whole of their property through the Jews. [This is of course hearsay, written down in 1942 on the remembered authority of a grandmother who had died in 1916. However, Vermouzek names a shopkeeper, in business in Těšany from 1904 to 1932, who seems to have done precisely this, and of whose activities the writer will have been well aware. He gave credit to everybody, "of course only if the buyer had some property", but he rigorously pursued debts, added on the interest, and if the debtor could not pay he had his property auctioned off.]

On 6 September 1887, grandfather's mother Marie Rycklíková, born Jindřichovská, died at the age of 79. Her daughter Marynka married Václav Král of No. 147, who went to Martnice as estate coachman. [I presume that "Martnice" was the estate which appears as "Martinice" on the modern 1:50,000 map, a little way along the road from the crossroads beyond Borkovany towards Hustopeče some six kilometers to the south-east of Těšany. The extra "i" has been inserted in another hand in one of the entries for 1930, but it is always "Martnice" in the original text.] And Josef, whom they called Pepek, married into a family with a cottage in Bošovice.

Between 1872 and 1877, the Rev Václav Kosmák, an outstanding and patriotic priest and writer, officiated at Moutnice. He was often in Těšany, because it formed part of the Moutnice parish, and he found more than one subject for his observations here.

1888

In October 1888, some pedlars, who were going from village to village selling geese, came to Těšany, and those that they didn't sell here they drove forward to Moutnice. There were two of them, an older man and an eleven-year-old boy. In Moutnice, they continued selling until evening, and nobody noticed whether they went on to another village or stayed with somebody overnight. After ten days, when they had not returned home, the father of the young boy, a man named Švábinský, went in search of them. Having established the direction in which they had set out, he went from village to village making enquiries, until he reached Moutnice where he discovered that they had sold the last of their stock. Where they then went, or whether they had stayed the night with somebody, he could not find out. The trail had gone cold.

How the trail was picked up again

In November, Fr. Kroupa of No. 90 took a pair of top-boots to cobbler Závlacký at No. 60 so that he could have them lined. After he had gone out, the cobbler's assistant picked up the boots and said, "These boots are just like the ones those pedlars had." The cobbler took them and examined them

closely, and realised that there was nothing for it but to make an announcement. He went and informed the mayor, Barnabáš Žáček at No. 12, and he in turn went straight for the police. The police came and took Kroupa for interrogation, but without result. Then they searched his house, and found a belt. After the belt was found, they sent for Švábinský, the father of the boy, and he immediately recognized the belt and stated that it was the property of his uncle. This caused a much more thorough search to be made of Kroupa's house. In the midden, they found parts of human bodies, and this was enough. Kroupa was immediately arrested and taken to the mayor, where he was further interrogated but again without result. But more and more evidence was coming to light, so that when Kroupa was taken to the district court at Židlochovice, his neighbour Vahala and Filip Kubínek were taken with him. There they all confessed.

How the murder was carried out

Kroupa had bought the last of the pedlars' geese. When paying, he saw that the man was carrying a large amount of money, some 190 gold pieces according to their confession. Kroupa himself offered them overnight lodging, and when they were asleep they killed the man with a cudgel. The boy awoke and started crying, the murderers could not pacify him, and so they clubbed him as well. Then they buried the bodies in the midden.

According to their confessions in the regional court, after a time they dug the bodies up again, and took them away at night in bags over their shoulders. They took them to Fasor's land, where Kroupa had two sections on lease. After this confession, the prisoners were taken there in a carriage so that they could show where the bodies were buried. The bodies were immediately dug up, of course in a marked state of decay. The murderers were made to watch. The bodies were then taken to the school, where they were cleaned, and after medical examination they were given Church burial.

The murderers were taken to Brno, where they were given a jury trial. Kroupa was sentenced to death by hanging, Vahala to imprisonment for life, and Kubínek to five years' imprisonment. The latter did not return to the village after serving his sentence. All this happened at Moutnice during the year 1888. It caused a great sensation throughout the region, and many people from Těšany went to the trial in Brno.

1888-1914

At that time, our father Tobiáš was 20 years old. He had not learned a trade, and he worked on the manor estate. His sister Karolina was already married to Tomáš Král of No. 147, who was the brother of the Václav Král who had married her aunt Marinka. In 1891, Tobiáš was called up for military service, and served with the 99th regiment at Jihlava and then at Znojmo. [Jihlava is a town and regional centre 75 km WNW of Brno, Znojmo a town 55 km SW of Brno, near to what is now the Austrian border.] In those days, military service was for three years. In the army, he worked as a cobbler. Maybe he hadn't been formally apprenticed, but during the winter, when he didn't go to the manor estate, he had learnt from his brother-in-law Tomáš Král how to mend boots, and in the army he found himself in a workshop where he learned to make new ones.

On 9 June 1895, after his return from military service, Tobiáš married Anna Sýkorová from Moutnice. She was our mother. She had been born on 24 December 1872, and was the daughter of František Sýkora and his deceased wife Anna, born Prokopová, from Žatčany. Mother's father was a shoemaker and had been widowed at the age of 44, being left with three children, František (20 years old), Anna (12), and Fabián (8). After two years, when his son František had been called up for military service at Jaroslav in Poland, he married nineteen-year-old Františka Nunvářová from Telnice, who was in service at Moutnice. This marriage produced ten children, all of whom lived. So mother was one of thirteen children. For a dowry, grandfather Sýkora bought mother a six-measure field from Josef Karažie of No. 36 for 600 gold pieces, of which he promised 500 and the young couple had to find the other hundred themselves. And father received an eight-measure field and a cottage from his parents.

During 1895 and 1896, a church was built in our village.

On the last day of 1896, I was born. Father wanted me to be christened with the name Aloisie. My godparents were Václav Sedláček and his wife Marie of No. 3. Then followed Františka, Marie, and Antonie. Františka was born in 1898 and died in June 1911. Marie, born in 1900, and Antonie, 1901, each died after half a year. On 31 December 1902, Antonín was born. It appears that there was great delight when after four daughters they had a son. But then came only sons. Tobiáš was born on

2 September 1904, Pavel on 29 June 1906, František on 28 May 1908, Josef on 4 December 1909, and Jaromír on 2 February 1912. [These will feature prominently in later years, often under nicknames: Antonín as “Tonda”, Tobiáš as “Doba”, František as “Franta”, Josef as “Joška”, and Jaromír as “Jara”.]

We were a large family, seven children, parents, and grandparents, eleven around the table. Father would say with pride, “I have six boys and each has a sister,” and people who didn’t know us would think he had twelve children. I remember our childhood years as years of delight, with shouting, bustle, and jollity, and also minor quarrels in our little kitchen, when one would accuse another and mother had to calm down, scold, commiserate with, or praise as was appropriate. But even as children, we were soon put to such work as we could manage. In those days, school attendance was not so strict, so they kept us at home when they needed us, whether it be for weeding the beet or other root crops, or in autumn for lifting potatoes or beet, or for threshing. The first threshing machine that I remember us having was a hand machine. It had two wheels with handles, two men operated it (four, two on each handle, if there were enough people), and the straw and grain fell into heaps and had to be raked out. To our grandparents, accustomed to threshing by flail, this seemed a very modern contrivance. After a couple of years, father bought a so-called “gin” thresher, turned by cows which were harnessed to the shaft and went round and round.

As long as our grandparents had their strength, father left them and our mother to look after the land, and went out to earn money. He even spent two years in Austria, in a cement works at Achau beyond Vienna. At that time many Czechs worked on estates and in factories in Austria, because workmen were better paid there, and many Czech boys went to Vienna to study. Then he spent two years at a cement works in Maloměřice [now a suburb on the north-eastern outskirts of Brno, but then possibly detached], and with the money thus earned, plus what the land brought in, our parents paid off the debt which they had incurred when rebuilding No. 100 in 1903. Then when opportunity arose they bought further fields, and father stopped going to the factory and took over the land. But in the autumn he went to the Sokolnice sugar factory, where he was supervisor of the weighing machine during the unloading of the beet. And in winter he sewed and repaired boots for us all. And for mother, our dear mother, it was work in the fields from dawn to dusk, and cooking for so many people, and washing, and the animals, and the poultry, and in the evening, instead of a rest, mending and sewing until I don’t know what hour.

In 1913, drains were installed in all sectors around Těšany where water was a problem.

In 1914, at the start of the first world war, we had 28 measures of fields of our own, and a further twelve measures on lease. To cultivate these fields, we had three cows and a heifer.

1914-1918

Came the first world war. During the night of July 31 and August 1, after 11 o’clock, village servant Josef Hrouzek banged the drum and announced that it was universal mobilization. People ran out and listened with alarm to this night-time announcement, then from all sides there arose weeping and lamentation, and nobody slept until dawn. The next day, after midday, the first call-up took place, of men aged up to 42. The departing men said goodbye, and got on waggons in front of the tavern of village mayor Josef Chalupa at No. 23. Their wives and children wept aloud, and the waggons left for the station at Sokolnice. There, the men took their last look at their native country and departed, some for the Russian frontier and some for the Serbian.

Then came years of hardship and deprivation. Goods quickly vanished from the shops, to emerge later at much higher prices, and speculators in foodstuffs reaped a rich harvest. Bread and flour were rationed, as was sugar. The entitlement for the latter was 1 kg per person per month. There was a great shortage of cloth, footwear, soap, and fat, and people from the towns came out into the country to look for food. The provisioning of the towns was very bad, and there were long queues in front of the shops of bakers and butchers. Many people stood in a queue for two or three hours until it was their turn, and when eventually they reached the door there was a notice “Sold Out”. Military commissioners scoured the countryside, soldiers went from house to house looking for hidden supplies, and anything they found was ruthlessly confiscated.

In the afternoon of 16 June 1916, I was scrubbing the floor, grandmother was sitting on the bed, and beside her on a chair sat aunt Marie Novotná from No. 103, who had come in for a chat. Mother was doing the darning, and everybody was talking about the war. Grandmother suddenly gave a cough and coughed up a spot of blood, then she started coughing more and more, and the gobs of blood which she coughed up fell into a pot which mother had pulled up to the bed. Mother immediately sent me to fetch father, and in less than a quarter of an hour we returned home. Grandmother was already dead,

and in the pot beside the bed were perhaps three litres of blood. Such a way of dying was all too sudden, and we children stood around her in awe and horror. She always said to us when death was talked about, "Children, don't be afraid of death, death itself is good, it is only the preparation for it that is evil." And for her this preparation was short, because she had not been ill. She was 76 years old. And on September 16 grandfather also died, and he was ill for only three days. The cause of his death was a hernia. He was 78. Thus, within two months of each other, died František Rychlík and Františka Rychlíková of No. 100.

In 1917, there was still no thought of an end to the war. New drafts were constantly ordered, even 50-year-olds being called up, and among them was our father. But he didn't have to sign on. At the police station was leading sergeant and local chief of police Trkan, who secured him exemption from military service. At that time, father and Fr. Hájek of No. 118 were acting as members of the village council, in place of the mayor and members who had been called up.

During this year, our street was metalled, but the inhabitants assisted the community by doing it themselves. They dug out gravel from the ditches, and brought in stone from the quarry owned by Štěpán Novotný of No. 47. [It would seem from the photograph given by Vermouzek, his Plate 33, that this was merely a rough metalling without an asphalt topping. There is a reference in May 1962 to asphalt being laid.]

This year, our eldest boy Antonín went as an apprentice to the manor garden, where the head gardener was Antonín Charvát. And nine-year-old František cut the fingers of his left hand in the feed chopper. The fingers were cut after the first knuckle, though not right through, and they stayed hanging by the skin. Father immediately took him to the children's hospital in Brno and after treatment the fingers grew on, but they remained crooked.

Then came 1918. Those soldiers who could escaped from the front and hid at home, or in the woods, or wherever else they could, so that they did not have to go back. And everywhere it was being said that we would have independence. This year, Tobiáš went to learn ironwork at Laxenburk near Vienna, where master smith Homola had moved from Moravia. Then came October 28, and with it the end of the Austrian monarchy. Many people did not want to believe that such a great and powerful empire had fallen, and that the Emperor had been flung off a throne which he had occupied by the grace of God. But it was indeed so, and there were celebrations with music and merriment.

Until 1918, various difficulties had prevented Těšany from being given its own rectory, but in 1918 these difficulties were overcome. To this end, No. 36 was bought from the widow Marie Karažiová. Until then, we had gone to church in Moutnice. Holy Mass was celebrated in our own church every third Sunday, but for christenings and weddings we had to go to Moutnice. The first priest to occupy the new rectory was the Rev. Alois Vaněk, who for a long time had been chaplain at Moutnice.