

United States Department of the Interior
 National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Beseda Hall and Sokol Park

Other names/site number: Beseda Sñ; Tabor Opera House

Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 115 N. Lidice Street

City or town: Tabor State: SD County: 57063

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national X statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 X A ___ B ___ C ___ D

_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:	_____ Date
_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____ Signature of commenting official:	_____ Date
_____ Title :	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL / meeting hall
RECREATION AND CULTURE / music facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL / meeting hall
RECREATION AND CULTURE / music facility

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

BRICK
SYNTHETICS / Vinyl
CONCRETE
METAL / Steel

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Located on a prominent corner in the center of Tabor, Beseda Hall (Beseda Sín in Czech) and Sokol Park are a large meeting hall and grounds that have long been a center of entertainment, celebration, and cultural tradition for the majority Czech descendant population of the town and surrounding area. They remain a central landmark for the town's annual Czech Days festival and are rented out for other events.

The oldest extant part of the hall was converted from a saloon dance hall into Tabor's Opera House in 1918; this is a wood-frame gabled volume. The visible pieces of its exterior have metal roofing and siding, but the interior retains the large open hall with historic wood flooring, wall and ceiling coverings, and large proscenium arch stage. Connected to the west is the one-story (plus basement) lobby/kitchen volume built in 1955 that fronts on Lidice Street. It has an arch roof with brick tile walls and a brick parapet façade. Connected to the south wall of the 1918 hall is a one-story annex completed in 1972, which has a shed roof and concrete block walls. On its south wall, added in 1992, is a shorter concrete patio with a shed roof. Sokol Park was purchased from a lumber company in 1931 for use by the Sokol club for their gymnastic/athletic demonstrations and Czech "beseda" folk dances. It has a central open lawn with mature shade

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trees and fencing on its west, south, and east sides, and a modern metal-framed grandstand structure near the east end of the south side (along Chicago Street), where bleachers can be set up.

Significant for its continued community use for Czech music, drama, dance, oratory, and civic events, the physical features of the hall and park have changed periodically with conversion to a park in the 1930s, interior remodeling of the hall in 1950, and the 1955, 1972, and 1992 volumes built on the exterior of the hall. These changes have facilitated evolving community uses and adaptations for public access, especially as the annual Czech Days festival became firmly established. The exterior façade and interior public spaces of the hall, and the open lawn and landscaping of the park define the historic integrity for this place of continued cultural use.

Narrative Description

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park are located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Lidice and Chicago Streets and are part of Tabor's commercial main street. Lidice Street has lost several older buildings, so the streetscape is varied, but buildings are generally one story with false-front or parapet roofs. The lot to the north of the hall is vacant, and the hall and park back onto the alley to the east. The historically commercial area of Tabor is along Lidice Street from Railroad Street north to Yankton Street—where the town's main church, St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church, and cemetery are located. From the 1910s-1950s, additional businesses developed two blocks east of Lidice along Hakl Street, which was the early route of S.D. Highway 50. Following the highway's re-alignment to run south of town, there have been additional businesses established along that route also. The railroad, which had run at a slight diagonal from southeast to northwest at the south end of Lidice Street, is now decommissioned and impassable. After the depot's removal, Lidice Street was extended south to the highway. Grain storage and transportation structures are still operating adjacent to the unused tracks but have been adapted for truck shipping. Most of the rest of the town is residential, apart from the elementary school that is north of the church and two parks. Takota Park is a half-block in size and is west of downtown on Springfield Street, and Leonard Cimpl Park—featuring a baseball diamond—is east of Hakl Street. Tabor was incorporated in 1901 and had a population of 407 in the 2020 census. Since 1910, its census population has ranged from 273 to 460.

On the property that is the subject of this nomination, Beseda Hall lies along the north and west lot lines. There is a graveled parking and utility space between Beseda Hall and the alley. Sokol Park is the open space directly south of the hall, extending to the corner of Lidice and Chicago Streets and to the alley at the east.

Beseda Hall (Contributing, Building)

Exterior

Beseda Hall is comprised of multiple parts: the main gabled wood-frame hall dating to 1918, the 1955 front lobby/kitchen on the west end that has brick walls and a stepped parapet barrel-arch

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roof, a 1972 concrete block addition to the south wall of the hall, and an open patio from 1992 that is just off-center on the south wall of the 1972 addition.

The west façade of Beseda Hall has a brick veneer of variegated dark red-brown colors with vertical-raked surface textures. Its parapet has concrete coping and a higher central section. Centered on the upper portion are metal letters individually mounted to the wall reading “BESEDA.” Mounted lower to either side of the letters are two shield-shaped metal box signs with the logos of the Katolický Dělník / Catholic Workman and the Katolicka Jednota Sokol (K.J.S.). Both have exterior neon light tubing outlining elements of the logos. There are four bays along the first floor. The first, third, and fourth have large window openings that feature rowlock sills and a minimally visible metal lintel beam. The glazing is set back about one wythe and is comprised of square, textured glass block with smaller one-light square metal hopper windows set into the glass block. The third and fourth bay windows are twelve blocks wide and seven blocks tall with two hopper windows, while the first bay’s opening is square (seven blocks wide and seven blocks tall) with only one hopper window.

The second bay of the façade has a deep-set entranceway. Several feet above the entrance, there is a metal light fixture with a circular angled shade. The entrance bay opening has a metal lintel like the windows, and a flat ceiling of large wood panels. The floor is painted concrete and ramps up from the sidewalk. The bay walls are mostly brick, with metal hand railings mounted to each. Near the doors, where the floor levels out, there are sections of the side walls that are vertical wood board panels with wood-framed glass block windows in each side. The windows are three blocks wide and five blocks tall. Centered between the two entrance doors is a wall with vertical board paneling and a signboard with “Vitáme Vás | Welcome to Beseda Hall” printed on it. Originally, there was a ticket booth at this position that was removed in 1999. In the ceiling above the sign is a box light. The wood entrance doors are hung with hinges on their outside edge, and each have a large, fixed light in an aluminum frame over a beveled wood panel. The exterior handles are aluminum and mounted on two vertical bars across the base of the doors’ windows; the interior push bars are aluminum also and diagonally mounted across the bottom of the windows. The wood walls and doors are painted on the exterior, and the doors are stained on the interior.

On the south elevation of the 1955 front, the façade brick carries around the corner for the depth of the parapet, but the remaining wall is a textured red brick tile. The two types of material have a staggered joining. The barrel-arch roof has corrugated steel roofing. Steel also backs the front parapet. The eave has a box soffit of metal and a metal gutter. Near the east end of the wall, near the eave, there are two small square openings for a vent hatch and a deep-set five-light window. There are two two-light metal hopper basement windows near grade. Off the southeast edge of the roof, there is a tall concrete block chimney

The next segment visible along the south wall is a small addition from 1995 for a walk-in cooler and storage room. It has a standing seam sheet metal shed roof. The concrete block masonry walls are in running bond and painted. The gable end and a wide eave have standing seam metal siding. In the gable end is a small square steel louvered vent. In its west wall, there is a solid

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steel door near the south end. A poured concrete ramp extends from the door to the west and turns southwest to a concrete sidewalk south of the hall.

The 1972 addition has a shallower roof slope, with rubber sheet roofing and three evenly spaced metal ventilators mounted on the roof. The eave has a steel gutter. The walls are painted concrete block in running bond. The western end of its south wall has no fenestration (corresponding to restrooms on the interior), then there are seven bays with windows or doors along the rest of the elevation. In the second bay is a set of double glass doors with wide black metal framing. In the fifth bay is a single door of the same style, more recent replacements. The remaining bays have single, short one-over-one aluminum-framed single-hung windows that likely date to the addition's construction. The windows do not have visible sills or lintels. There are light fixtures at the corners of the addition wall. They have angled circular shades, matching the light over the entrance on the facade.

The 1992 patio has a shallow shed roof with corrugated metal roofing. Its concrete slab floor sits on a concrete base that was molded to a pattern of textured brick. The patio has a black metal railing with square frames and twisted flat balusters. The railing and patio roof are supported by thin square metal posts. The ceiling is corrugated steel and a central beam running along the length is supported by two additional columns. Six metal fixtures for pairs of fluorescent tube lights are fixed to the ceiling. Above the railings, rolled windbreak curtains of a coated plastic sheeting are mounted to the patio ceiling. Off the patio to the east and west are concrete access ramps that have a brick-patterned base and simple metal framed railings. Along the ramps, metal handrails are also mounted to the 1972 addition wall. In the ells of the patio and its ramps, there are brick pavers, landscape shrubs, and metal flagpoles.

The east elevation of the 1972 addition has no fenestration. Two spans of a chain-link fence extend east from a south-of-center point on the wall. The east wall of the gabled 1918 hall section is covered with vertical standing seam metal siding. A solid metal door is at ground level near the south end of the section. There is a metal box light mounted above it. Centered on the elevation is a solid metal door higher on the wall (aligned with the stage in the interior). Above the door is a light sconce with an enameled metal shade. An unpainted metal stair and small deck, with open tread risers and pipe railings, lead up to the door.

The north elevation of the 1918 hall section has vertical standing seam metal siding. Towards the east end, there are small windows high on the wall (aligned with the stage). There are six aluminum-framed windows along the rest of that wall. The ends of four metal tie rods are also visible near the roof eave. The 1918 hall has a standing seam metal roof with minimal eaves and metal cap edging. Spaced evenly along the ridge of the roof, there are two ventilators. There is a red brick chimney towards the east end of the north slope. The hall has had a metal roof since 1934, its current windows date to 1972, and metal siding was added in 1995. The west gable end wall of the 1918 portion that is visible above the 1955 front also has metal siding. The north elevation of the 1955 front section has the wrapped façade brick, red brick tile walls, and two-light basement windows, matching the south side of this section. There is no other fenestration.

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Interior, Lobby/Kitchen

The 1955 front section of Beseda Hall houses the lobby and kitchen on the main level, a basement, and a small attic above. The two main entrance doors are as previously described. The doors and windows at the entrance bay have simple framing of stained wood with mitered corners. There is a small closet (former ticket booth) between them with a single-leaf wood door. Around the entrances, the wall has wide vertical stained wood paneling. Matching paneling is used on the lobby's east wall, where there are entrances to the main hall. The remainder of the lobby and kitchen's side walls are cream-colored glazed brick tile. The lobby and kitchen have a dropped ceiling of rectangular acoustic tiles with fixtures for fluorescent tube lights and ceiling fans. The lobby has a yellow flecked linoleum flooring that is original. Kitchen spaces on the south end of the room have more recent cream-colored linoleum flooring. Half-height walls with red/brown brick veneer and stained wood caps line the steps to the basement in the northeast corner as well as extending along the north edge of the kitchen space. Additional counter walls extend south and southwest from the brick kitchen wall; they have a light wood veneer on their sides and a yellow Formica-type countertop. The space north of the entrance bay has hanger rod fixtures for coats.

There are several entrances to the hall along the east wall of the lobby and kitchen, all with solid book-matched veneer doors and framing that matches that at the main entrance. The northernmost door is on a swing hinge with a push plate. The third door, accessed from the kitchen area, is a Dutch door with a wood ledge at the top of the lower section. A large L-shape section extends from the east wall of the kitchen and is lined with lower cabinets beneath wide laminate counters. Serving window openings along the "L" have pairs of long accordion wood doors. The mid-century cabinets have book-matched wood veneer doors and aluminum-finished arch handles. In the center of the floor of this space is an island fixture with large sinks, side counters, and lower cabinets. The walls and ceiling of this space have faux-wood paneling and a long fluorescent light fixture. Off this space to the south, through a wide opening without doors, is a small hall with paneled walls and, on its east wall, a door to a walk-in freezer/refrigerator. Along the south wall of the kitchen room, there are lower cabinets of the same design as described interspersed with stoves and dishwashing appliances. There is a vent fan mounted in the wall near the southeast corner, and, above a grill, there is a wood-paneled fixture with an exhaust fan. The lower cabinets extend around the southwest corner of the room, and there are matching upper cabinets on the west wall. These partially cover a window opening, and the remainder of the opening has faux paneling. Off that corner is another more recent island with a solid laminate counter and lower wood cabinets having molded edges and some panel detailing.

In the northeast corner of the lobby, the brick half-wall around the basement steps has a half-door at its eastern end. Open-riser wood steps lead down through an opening between concrete beams in the floor. The steps are supported by board posts on their south side, onto which there is a round wood handrail mounted. The basement floor is poured concrete, the walls are glazed yellow tile, and the ceiling is open cast concrete beams to which long fixtures for fluorescent tube lights, as well as various utilities, are mounted. There are round metal column posts supporting the lobby floor spaced along the middle of the basement north to south. In the northwest corner of the basement, brick tile walls extend to create a storage space and small

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rooms formerly used for restrooms, now vacant/inoperable. Originally, the basement had a utility/laundry room and space for food freezers, was used as a secondary social space, and could serve as a storm shelter.

Above the lobby/kitchen, there is small attic space used for storage. It is accessed by a door from the enclosed hall balcony (described later).

Interior, Main Hall and Stage

The main hall was substantially expanded and a stage added on the east end in 1918. A balcony (now enclosed) on the west end dates to 1938, and the current floor and the wall and ceiling finishes date to 1950, after school basketball teams moved from using this building to their new gymnasium. The main hall has a sealed tongue-and-groove wood floor; the use of a darker stain creates a border along the north and south sides of the floor. The ceiling is a shallow gable that has a concave slope at the north and south edges, and it is clad with rectangular Nu-Wood board panels. The panels have been painted but their original pattern maintained; they are mostly white with a dull pink pattern applied to create a border line and three diamonds aligned at the peak.¹ The ceiling also has two boxed ventilator fans that are centered in two of the diamonds, a modern globe-shaped dance light mounted east of center, a bar of modern stage lights suspended by chains near the east end, and two rows of ceiling fans interspersed with long box light fixtures along the length of the hall.

The north, south, and east walls of the hall have vertical Pickwick-style (with molding near the joints) wood paneling wainscot that is about five feet tall. The top edge of this paneling rises where there are short staircases in the northern corners and follows around the arc of the stage apron wall. There is a wide, metal, diamond-grid vent centered at the bottom of the apron wall. There is a short wood baseboard. The upper sections of the wall are white Nu-Wood vertical panels that have beaded-style joints and molding along its bottom edge, where it meets the wainscot, and at the crown, where it meets the ceiling. Under the balcony at the west end, the walls have vertical wood paneling up to just above the height of the doors, the remainder of the wall to the ceiling has faux wood paneling.

On the west wall, the main level includes a door into the kitchen, the serving counters, the Dutch door into the kitchen, the knob and push doors into the lobby, and stairs to a door halfway up the wall leading into the enclosed balcony. Two doors of different heights, facing south, lead to a storage space under the balcony stairs. A square post veneered with wood supports the balcony wall. The balcony level has been enclosed with faux wood paneling. There are two square vent openings with metal grilles either side of center, north of them is a hinged access panel door, and at the north end is the door into the balcony.

Steps, with a turn to the south, lead into the balcony. There is a square support post near the top of the stairs, and a metal pipe railing stands from the floor along the west edge of the stair. The wall built to enclose the balcony is unfinished wood framing and plywood sheathing at the back.

¹ The Nu-Wood ceiling was originally a tan color with white accents, which is visible in a photograph hanging in the hall and in unpainted remnants in the enclosed balcony.

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Some utility ducts are installed in the balcony, and storage shelves line its west wall. The rest of the balcony walls are the Pickwick style wood paneling beneath Nu-Wood panels, although dotted acoustic square tiles line the upper section of the west wall. A single step leads to the door that opens to the attic space above the lobby.

The north wall of the hall has six windows in narrow wood framing with a narrow sill. At the west corner, the stairs leading to the balcony have a solid wall railing on their south side. At the east corner, a short set of stairs go to a door leading onto the stage. These stairs have a cut string, with beadboard on the side, a simple square metal rail mounted on their south side, and a round wood handrail mounted to the wainscot on the wall. The door to the stage is a three-paneled wood door within a simple wood framing.

The south wall of the hall has had multiple openings cut in to join the main space with the 1972 annex. The volume is framed in a dark wood; it has entrance openings at both ends and a third just off center to the west. Between each sets of doors, there are large square openings over half-walls, where the wood panel wainscot was retained. Near the west end of the south wall, three large drink coolers are mounted in the wall, filled from the back from the cooler accessed off the kitchen. There is faux wood paneling on the wall around the coolers.

The east wall features Beseda Hall's stage. Flanking the stage opening, there are rectangular grid vents high on the wall. The stage's proscenium arch includes square base blocks and hexagonal wood pilasters with square wood caps. The arch is made of wood, painted, with subtle decoration at the apex – three incised horizontal lines flank a small, raised, diamond panel. At the north end of the east wall are the stairs, previously described, to a stage door. At the south end, there is a three-paneled wood door at floor-level that leads to a split stair to the stage and basement space below the stage.

The stage has tongue-and-groove wood flooring, and there is a small square door in the apron floor with two sets of strap hinges for the prompter box. The stage ceiling has square Nu-Wood tile panels, and there are two metal light fixtures with long fluorescent tube lights. Older lath-and-plaster finishing is visible behind some damaged tiles. The stage walls are plaster. The stage has several rows of curtains and drops suspended from the ceiling with chains on hooks. The first roll-down drop, behind the front curtain, has a large white space for projected films around which there is a black border and floral/fern designs painted. Further back, there are side panel drops and two full-length drops—one with a scene of a European city and one with an outdoor scene. The drops are rolled on circular beams and are operated by ropes on pulleys with anchor points on the north wall.

In the southwest corner of the stage is a split-level staircase, with a door to the hall at the mid-point and continuing down to the basement. The wood staircase has simple square newel posts and beadboard wood walls at the north edge and at the center. At the bottom, there is a Z-braced beadboard door into the basement. The basement under the stage is largely an open, unfinished room with wood framing above poured concrete walls. There is a little graffiti on some wood wall boards, including one reading "Rokusek & Matuska"—owners of the building from 1919 to 1930, when it operated as the Opera House. A wood beam extending east-to-west is supported by square wood posts. A boiler room in its northeast corner has minimally finished wood-frame

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walls with plywood sheathing on the interior. There is an exterior metal door on the south end of the east wall.

Interior, Annex

The annex, built in 1972 off the south wall of the hall, is primarily an open room. It has a sealed concrete floor, faux wood paneling on its west and north walls (interior walls), painted concrete block on the south and east walls (exterior walls), and a dropped ceiling with rectangular tiles. The ceiling has lights embedded in the ceiling grid as well as a few vent panels and suspended ceiling fans. On the west wall are two single doors at the far ends, which lead to restrooms. Most windows and doors of this space have simple mitered wood framing, except the replacement exterior double doors.

Sokol Park (Contributing, Site)

Sokol Park is located south of Beseda Hall. It has a large open lawn space at the center that was historically used for sokol athletics, band concerts, movies, and more. There are mature deciduous trees along the east and west sides of the park, with a double row of trees at the west, and along the western half of the south side.²

In the southwest corner of the park is a 1985 sign structure of red-brown variegated brick with “TABOR” incised in concrete above an embedded electronic sign board that was installed in 2019.³ The park is bordered on west, south, and east sides by a chain-link fence, about four feet high, with flag poles (about ten feet high) periodically along each side. The fence has two entrances on the west side along Lidice St., a single gate at the sidewalk to the patio and one nearer the south end has a double gate. Just inside the double gate is a metal archway with “Sokol Park / Est. / 1944” in its ornamentation. It was added in 2022. The fence has another entrance at its clipped southeast corner, with longer vehicle gates.

At the northwest, in the ell of the hall’s 1955 and 1995 sections, there is also a metal pergola frame and a small shed of standing seam sheet metal with a wood door on its west side.

Sokol Park Grandstand (Non-Contributing, Structure)

There is a modern grandstand structure near the southeast corner of the park, built in 2011 to replace the previous wood stand that had been severely damaged in a late 2010 storm. The stand has a concrete pad base and a short wall of standing seam metal at its back (south) elevation. Eight metal trusses arch to the north and the front edge is supported by round metal posts. The trusses are covered with a durable tarpaulin. The bleacher units are moveable, not part of the structure.

² After 2021, a mature spruce was removed from near the southwest corner.

³ Date information from Dennis Povondra to author, 7 July 2024.

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Integrity

The following features of the property support the continuing historic integrity of Beseda Hall and Sokol Park as a place historically associated with cultural activities and celebrations of the Czech descendant community in South Dakota:

- The location of Beseda Hall and Sokol Park and their position adjacent to each other, along Tabor's main street (Lidice St.).
- The size, massing, and roof shapes of the sections of Beseda Hall.
- The exterior of the 1955 volume of Beseda Hall and especially its Lidice St. façade, including its historic brick and brick tile walls, stepped parapet roofline, glass-block windows, deep-set entranceway with two historic doors having aluminum hardware, and the signs for "BESEDA," Catholic Workman, and Sokol logo signs.

The volume of the 1918 hall volume is minimally visible and has been altered; its interior historic integrity is more critical to the public experience of that section.

- The public activity spaces of Beseda Hall:
 - The open 1918 hall with low-gabled ceiling, narrow wood flooring, Pickwick style wood wainscot, and Nu-Wood panel upper walls and ceiling; the stage with curved apron, wood floor, historic rolled drops, proscenium arch and surround, and stage stairs.
 - The 1955 lobby/kitchen with wood panel and glazed brick tile walls, linoleum floors, brick veneer half-walls and front counter, book-matched wood doors, and the mid-century wood wall cabinets with aluminum hardware.
 - The open concrete floor and concrete block walls of the 1972 annex and the open-walled canopy roof, metal posts and railings, and accessible ramps of the 1992 patio.
- The open center lawn and bordering shade trees define the historic character of Sokol Park.

Having a stage/performance space and seating structure are also traditional components of the park, though the actual structures for these functions have changed over the decades. Performance structures have included the bandstand moved in and out during the 1930s, temporary trailer-hauled stages in the 1960s, and concrete stages built for the 1972 Czech Days (as later enclosed) and in 1992. The first seating structure was a lumber shed converted into a grandstand, which was replaced with the current metal truss canopy after the first was destroyed by a storm in 2010.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

PERFORMING ARTS

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

ETHNIC HERITAGE / Czech

Period of Significance

1918-present

Significant Dates

1918

1930

1931

1950

1955

1972

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park have a long history and central role in the perpetuation of Czech cultural traditions for the town of Tabor, the surrounding community, and even descendants dispersed far and wide. The property is nominated under Criterion A at a state level of significance in the areas of Social History, Performing Arts, Entertainment/Recreation, and Czech Ethnic Heritage. The period of significance begins with 1918, the date that the oldest part of the building had substantial remodeling to turn an existing saloon's dance hall into the town's Opera House. When the local Catholic lodges bought the Opera House—renaming it Beseda Hall—and then the lumberyard next door to create Sokol Park, the building continued to be used regularly for Czech dramatic plays, Sokol tournaments, movies, music concerts, school carnivals, basketball games, public dances, wedding dances, and more.

From the Czech independence movement of 1918 through World War II and beyond, important speakers and programs have connected attendees to affairs affecting Czechoslovakia, many of whom had family still in Europe. Public meetings about important town concerns were held in the hall, from bank closures in the 1920s and 1930s to the new electrical co-operative set up after WWII. Few big town celebrations happened without using Beseda Hall for programs, meals, concerts, and/or dances.

The most enduring expression of cultural heritage, Czech Days, became an annual festival in 1950. Thousands attend, and it draws back descendants of Czech families who had history in Tabor and the surrounding area. When founded in 1975, the local Czech Heritage Preservation Society renewed local traditions of the Czech language and of amateur dramatics, with members even writing new plays and pageants to perform in Beseda Hall and Sokol Park. The period of significance continues to the present day as the building has continued to be a state landmark of Czech cultural traditions, especially around Czech Days. It is also still used by the community for music performances, dances, wedding receptions, and other gatherings.

Although Beseda Hall and Sokol Park were owned, managed, and used by Catholic-affiliated fraternal and social lodges from 1930 to 2022, the property meets Criteria Consideration A for Religious Properties because the significance is primarily associated with the histories of entertainment, the town, and Czech ethnic heritage. The venue was also widely used by other local organizations and for numerous types of general community events.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

History of Czech (Bohemian)⁴ Immigration to South Dakota

In the 1840s and 1850s in Austrian-controlled Bohemia, droughts and political upheaval precipitated Czech immigration to the United States in the search for land and better economic prospects. Austria also had compulsory military service that some Czech emigrants cited as a particular reason for leaving.⁵ Czech women immigrated in numbers roughly equal to men. Around 40-45% of Czech immigrants were Catholic, 5% Protestant, and the rest “Freethinkers”—a Czech tradition of atheist or non-denominational beliefs. Freethinkers did not align with any religion and promoted the separation of church and state, and one sub-set was more militantly anti-religion. In Europe, the Catholic church had supported the Austrian state. In the U.S., areas of settlement included the rural Midwest, but around 45% formed urban enclaves in cities like New York City, Milwaukee, Cleveland, St. Louis, Chicago, and Omaha. By 1910, a quarter of all Czechs in the U.S. lived in the Great Plains states of Nebraska, Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, and North and South Dakota. When arriving in Dakota Territory in the late 19th century, Czech settlers came more often from other eastern U.S. locations than directly from Europe.⁶

Euro-American settlement in southeastern Dakota started in earnest after the 1858 Treaty of Washington removed about 11 million acres of land east of the Missouri River from the Yankton Dakota, whose tribal reservation was established on the east side of the Missouri River near the Nebraska state border.⁷ The 1862 Homestead Act provided an affordable path to land ownership that appealed to many prospective Euro-American settlers. Seeing advertisements for land or

⁴ The Kingdom of Bohemia was part of the Austrian empire for almost four hundred years, from 1526 until achieving independence from Austria-Hungary and, with its Slovak neighbors, forming the state of Czechoslovakia in 1918. After periods of control by Nazi Germany and later the U.S.S.R., the country divided into Slovakia and the Czech Republic in 1992. Czech (Čech, feminine Češka, adjective český) will be used in preference to Bohemian except when referencing historical use, quotes, or names. Kenneth D. Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks in America* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920), 12-13, 17.

⁵ William H. Elznic, “Bohemians in Richland County,” *North Dakota Historical Collections* 4 (1913), 62-63; Thomas Capek, *The Čechs (Bohemians) in America: A Study of Their National, Cultural, Political, Social, Economic and Religious Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 25, 28; Josef Křížan, *Souvenir of Czechoslovak Day Festival... at Gregory, South Dakota* (1936), 16; Clarence John Kubicek, “The Czechs of Butler County, 1870-1940,” Thesis, M.A. History, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (July 1958), 3; Marilee Richards, ed., “Life Anew for Czech Immigrants: The Letters of Marie and Vavřín Strítecký, 1913-1934,” *South Dakota History* 11(4) (October 1981), 254-255; Joseph John Van Hof, *A History of the Czechs in Knox County, Nebraska*. Thesis, M.A. History, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (1938 [1980]), 3; Joseph A. Dvořák, comp., *Memorial Book: History of the Czechs in the State of South Dakota*. Edward M. Bubak, ed., and Laddie E. Kostel, trans., (Tabor SD: Czech Heritage Preservation Society, 1980 [original 1920]), 16; John Leonard Jennewein and Jane Boorman, *Dakota Panorama* (Dakota Territory Centennial Commission, 1973), 113; Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks*, 21-22, 44.

⁶ Capek, *The Čechs*, 36-44, 51; Bruce M. Garver, “Czech-American Freethinkers on the Great Plains, 1871-1914,” in Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Center for Great Plains Studies, 1980), 147-148; John E. Rau, *Czech Folk Architecture of Southeastern South Dakota*, Multiple Property Documentation Form, National Register of Historic Places (December 1986), 8.2.

⁷ Coleman, Patrick. “A Rare Find: The Treaty of Washington 1858.” *Minnesota History* 59(5) (Spring 2005), 197-199.

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hearing from friends or family about opportunities in the territory, many homesteaders made their way west as individuals or families. In a few cases, colonization societies formed to organize the people, travel, and supplies needed for a group settlement, often with the encouragement of “railroads, steamship companies, and state boards of immigration.”⁸ For Dakota Territory, one of the earliest of such groups was the Bohemian Agricultural Society, or “Česká osada,” who came from Chicago to Yankton and Bon Homme Counties in 1869.⁹ Historical accounts describe that the society started in June 1868 with a meeting at the saloon/tavern of Frank Bem in Chicago and spread through appeals for members in Czech-language newspapers.¹⁰ Members had to speak Czech and pay a fee of one dollar. The society’s goal was limited to finding land and coordinating travel, not directing or financially supporting the resulting settlements. The society attracted hundreds of members from a wide area including Cleveland, Detroit, and Milwaukee.¹¹ Bem, with Frank Janousek and Edward Strausse, made initial trips to Kansas and then to Nebraska to scout for land. In May 1869, Bem and Frank Janousek led a small group towards Niobrara, Nebraska. They went by rail as far as they could to Sioux City where they bought wagons, oxen, and farm implements. They then traveled by wagon to the sandhills of Nebraska, but many were disappointed with the prospects, and some returned to Chicago. A surveyor (or engineer) from Yankton named Charles Meyer (or Myers) convinced a group to visit Dakota Territory. A few crossed the Missouri River at the Santee Agency and brought back good reports, so the group went on towards Yankton and crossed the river there by ferry on the 4th of July 1869. Yankton had a brewery, and Jan Dufek—who had moved there in 1867—could translate for them from English to Czech. Janousek, however, remained convinced of Nebraska’s benefits, and the Society broke apart. Bem led those who had decided to buy land west of Yankton around Lakeport, and he continued to recruit additional settlers by writing for eastern newspapers. Some Czechs who had previously settled in Iowa also relocated to the new communities in Dakota Territory.¹²

⁸ Frederick C. Luebke, “Ethnic Group Settlement on the Great Plains,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (October 1977), 410.

⁹ The first, the “Free Homestead of Central New York” of about thirty families arrived in 1864 to settle around the James River by Yankton. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 13 July 1939; Herbert S. Schell, *Dakota Territory during the Eighteen Sixties* (Vermillion: Governmental Research Bureau, University of South Dakota, 1954); Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961[1968]), 79; Michael Cwach, “Czech Immigration to South Dakota,” in Selected Papers from the 2003 Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences, Inc. (SVU) North American Conference, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 26-28 June 2003, accessed online, 9 August 2024, https://svu2000.org/conferences/2003_Iowa/03.pdf, 1; Richards, “Life Anew,” 258; Van Hof, *A History*, 4.

¹⁰ John R. Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements and Social Organization in South Dakota*, South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin, no. 313 (Brookings: South Dakota State College, 1937), 23; Sister Mary Claudia Duratschek, *Builders of God's Kingdom: The History of the Catholic Church in South Dakota* (Yankton SD: Sacred Heart Convent, 1985), 18; Robert F. Karolevitz, *With Faith, Hope, and Tenacity: The First One Hundred Years of the Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls, 1889-1989* (Mission Hill, SD: Dakota Homestead Publishers, 1989), 25.

¹¹ Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 21; Rose Rosicky, comp., *A History of Czechs (Bohemians) in Nebraska* (Omaha NE: Czech Historical Society of Nebraska, 1929), accessed online: 5 September 2023, <http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/topic/ethnic/czechs/cz-pg444.html>; Van Hof, *A History*, 4; Robert F. Karolevitz, *Yankton: The Way It Was!* (Freeman, SD: Pine Hill Press, 1998), 85.

¹² Frank Bem (1838-1890) later lived in Ziskov, Tyndall, Scotland, and Olivet. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 13 July 1939; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 17-24, 111, 121; Rosicky, *A History*; Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements*, 23; Capek, *The Čechs*, 106-107; Cwach, “Czech Immigration,” 1-3; Van Hof, *A History*, 5; Duratschek, *Builders*, 18;

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The nucleus of Czech settlement in Dakota Territory was between Yankton and Bon Homme Counties along the Missouri River, where small trade centers like Ziskov, Vodnany, Janousek, and Havlicek formed. As will be detailed below, a Czech literary society started the town of Tabor. The towns of Utica, Lesterville, Tyndall, and Scotland also came to have significant Czech populations. Czech settlers also eventually went north to the area around Crow Lake in Jerauld County and by Kimball in Brule County. They expanded west into Charles Mix, Gregory, and Tripp Counties after lands that had been part of the Yankton Dakota and Rosebud Lakota reservations were opened for settlement by the U.S. government in 1890-1910. For instance, in 1920 in Charles Mix County, the town of Dante (incorporated 1909) was predominately Czech with a Czech Catholic church and hall, and the town of Wagner had a sizable population and a large Czech fraternal hall. Droughts in the 1890s in Brule County and 1910s in Tripp County affected the durability of Czech settlement, leading some to return east or push on further west. Over these years, Bon Homme and Yankton Counties maintained the largest numbers of Czech descendants. In 1910, those two counties had about 60% of the state's Czech population. By 1914, as the war in Europe began, Czech migration to South Dakota slowed.¹³ In 1917, South Dakota had four Czech Protestant churches and twelve Czech (or mixed Czech) Catholic churches, missions, or stations.¹⁴ Czech immigration to the U.S. slowed further after Czechoslovakian independence in 1918 and after Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924, which set limited quotas.¹⁵

Several histories of Czech immigrant communities have concluded that they maintained Old World traditions over decades because of their past experiences in Europe struggling to maintain a distinct cultural identity under Austrian rule.¹⁶ One state history summarized it as: "At the heart of Bohemian life and culture lies the fact that for centuries the Bohemian people were a conquered nationality, suffering oppression and striving to maintain their national culture and independence. This helps to account for the idealism and democracy of her people."¹⁷ For instance, the song that became the foundation for the Czech national anthem, "Kde domov můj," had been part of an opera that the Austrian police banned after its first performance in Prague in 1834. Yet, the song, expressing adoration of the Czech land and people, spread and endured and became the official anthem after independence in 1918.¹⁸ In the 1840s, there had been a "renaissance of Czech national language and literature, bringing with it a revival of the Czech national consciousness."¹⁹ After the 1848 revolutions, Austria restricted the public use of the Czech language for things like newspapers and telegrams, forcing education in German. In the

Karolevitz, *Yankton*, 85; Karolevitz, *With Faith*, 25; "Frank Bem," Find-A-Grave, accessed online, 17 November 2023, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/112333367/frank-bem>.

¹³ Jan Habenicht, *History of Czechs in America* (St. Paul MN: Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International, 1996 [original 1910]), 247-249; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 20, 69-85; Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements*, 24-25, 48; Jennewein and Boorman, *Dakota Panorama*, 114-115; Duratschek, *Builders*, 210, 226, 233; Richards, "Life Anew," 258; Křížan, *Souvenir*, 18; Rau, *Czech Folk Architecture*, 7.1, 8.4-8.

¹⁴ Capek, *The Čechs*, 247.

¹⁵ Garver, "Czech-American Freethinkers," 163-164.

¹⁶ Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements*, 26; Duratschek, *Builders*, 157.

¹⁷ Jennewein and Boorman, *Dakota Panorama*, 117.

¹⁸ Vladimír Kucera and DeLores Kucera, eds., *Czech Music in Nebraska* (Self-published, 1980), 10-13.

¹⁹ Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks*, 13; Rosicky, *A History*.

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1860s, Czechs got the right to use their language in their schools and have some legislative representation, and they rebuilt cultural identity through music, theatre, art, and literature.²⁰

Immigrant and descendant communities in the U.S. placed high importance on maintaining Czech language and culture through similar methods.²¹ Their close settlement patterns, social organizations, holidays, and language use maintained cultural ties and practices longer than might have otherwise been the case.²² They also created active U.S. networks of support for Czechoslovak independence and post-war recovery efforts around World War I, as well as efforts during World War II for the Czech government-in-exile and Czech soldiers serving with England or Russia.²³ Yet, Czech settlements in America did not have a pattern of strict self-isolation. J.A. Dvorak's 1920 history of Czechs in South Dakota noted that the concentration of settlement around Tabor had helped preserve Czech culture. However, writing just after WWI, he also asserted their "absolute loyalty to this new land... a Czech person can proudly claim his origin without suffering denial of his Americanism."²⁴ Rose Rosicky's 1929 history of Czechs in Nebraska described the "double load" that these communities had had during the war, when their women's auxiliaries sewed or knitted cloth goods and held fundraising events both for the Czech efforts and for the American Red Cross.²⁵ In his 1958 history thesis on Czechs in Butler County, Nebraska, Clarence Kubicek wrote that "no group of foreign people ever strove harder to learn the language of a new country than did the Czechs, and probably no nationalistic group that settled in Nebraska tried harder to maintain their native tongue at the same time."²⁶ A 1973 history noted that in Tabor about 60% still spoke Czech in the home but increasingly few people could read or write in Czech.²⁷

Across the U.S., Czechs formed strong community organizations who prioritized perpetuating cultural identity. The oldest fraternal organization was the Czech-Slovak Protective Society (C.S.P.S.), established in St. Louis in 1854 to provide insurance and other financial support to its members. Men and wives of members could join. Women also formed separate organizations, including the Unity of Czech Women in Chicago in 1870 and the Sisterly Benevolent Society in Cleveland in 1890. After the C.S.P.S.'s 1896 convention, a set of lodges split and organized a Western Bohemian Fraternal Association / Zápvní Česko Bratrská Jednota (Z.C.B.J.) in Omaha

²⁰ Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks*, 13, 30-31.

²¹ Elznic, "Bohemians," 62-63, 69; Capek, *The Čechs*, 164, 241; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 140; Kubicek, "The Czechs," 69, 144; Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks*, 90, 92; Richards, "Life Anew," 259, 261; Van Hof, *A History*, 29; Vladimir Kucera, *Czech Drama in Nebraska* (Self-published, 1979), 10; Maxine K. Schuurmans, *One Hundred Years of Tyndall: A Centennial History* (1979), 87, 121; Esther Jerabek, "The Transition of a New-World Bohemia," *Minnesota History* 15(1) (March 1934), 36, 38, 40.

²² Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 42; Duratschek, *Builders*, 19, 157, 212.

²³ Jerabek, "The Transition," 40-41; Van Hof, *A History*, 32; Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks*, 78-79, 85, 108; Capek, *The Čechs*, 265-277; Kubicek, "The Czechs," 123-128; Bruce Garver, "Immigration to the Great Plains, 1865-1914: War, Politics, Technology, and Economic Development," *Great Plains Quarterly* 31 (Summer 2011), 191; Joseph Chada, *The Czechs in the United States* (SVU (Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences, Inc.) Press, 1981), 43-60; "Little Bohemia Historic District," Omaha, Nebraska. National Register of Historic Places nomination (#100005336), 41.

²⁴ Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 42, 178.

²⁵ Rosicky, *A History*.

²⁶ Kubicek, "The Czechs," 51.

²⁷ Jennewein and Boorman, *Dakota Panorama*, 115.

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the following year. The Z.C.B.J. integrated women members at its first convention, though members also had to be white and of Czech (full or partial) ancestry. They provided insurance and financial aid to members in need, established cemeteries and held funerals, and supported Czech cultural activities like language schools and libraries.²⁸ In the 1920s, the Z.C.B.J. started allowing English-language affiliate lodges, in order to bring in younger generations who spoke less and less Czech.²⁹ In the Freethinker tradition, these lodges were typically “resolutely secular and sought to maintain Czech language and culture while helping members become productive and prosperous American citizens.”³⁰ Czech Catholics also formed their own fraternal and social organizations, such as the Katolický Dělník / Catholic Workmen and the Knights of St. Wenceslaus.³¹ Many Czech communities formed Sokol societies for the pursuit of athletic activity (especially gymnastics and calisthenics), as well as Czech music, language, and theatre. The Sokol movement had started in Prague in 1862 and expanded through the U.S. after being first introduced in St. Louis in 1865.³² One historian described it as “the most ethnically alert and assertive” Czech cultural organization.³³ Local branches of the National Sokol Union (Tělocvičná Jednota or “Tel Jed” Sokols, later American Sokol) often had the support of Z.C.B.J. or C.S.P.S. lodges. In 1893, the St. Wenceslaus Church in Omaha formed its own Sokol, and from there started a parallel network of Catholic Sokol clubs extending from Texas to Detroit.³⁴ Most Sokols had members of a variety of ages, both men and women. Sokols practiced “close-order drills and gymnastics such as parallel bars, spring board, horizontal bar, horse, rings and balance beam,” they also formed drama clubs, choirs, and orchestras.³⁵ In the 1910s to 1930s, Sokol teams in South Dakota worked often with those in Nebraska in districts to coordinate instruction, exhibition events, drama performances, and “slets” (large meets, rallies, or festivals).³⁶ Nationally, the number of National clubs peaked in 1933.³⁷ By 1937, South Dakota communities had twenty Z.C.B.J. lodges, four C.S.P.S. lodges, and nine Sokol societies (five

²⁸ The Z.C.B.J. in Tyndall, S.D. held summer schools from 1900 until WWI. C.S.P.S and Z.C.B.J. are both still around as insurance providers, but only the Z.C.B.J (now merged into a company called BetterLife) has active “member groups” in South Dakota. Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 56-57; Capek, *The Čechs*, 258-259; Křižan, *Souvenir*, 5-7; Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks*, 84; Richards, “Life Anew,” 259-260; Schuurmans, *One Hundred Years*, 86-88; Van Hof, *A History*, 23; Garver, “Czech-American Freethinkers,” 159.

²⁹ Van Hof, *A History*, 24.

³⁰ Garver, “Czech-American Freethinkers,” 155.

³¹ Van Hof, *A History*, 24.

³² Capek, *The Čechs*, 254; Rosicky, *A History*, 352-355; Kucera, *Czech Drama*, 10; Kubicek, “The Czechs,” 135; “Sokol Comes to America,” accessed online, 22 May 2024, <https://sokolmuseum.org/sokol-comes-to-america/>.

³³ Chada, *The Czechs*, 145.

³⁴ Garver, “Czech-American Freethinkers,” 157; “Sokol Comes to America.”

³⁵ German immigrant communities organized similar societies, the Turnverein or “Turners.” Schuurmans, *One Hundred Years*, 89; “Sokol Comes to America.”

³⁶ Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements*, 26; Capek, *The Čechs*, 239; Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks*, 69-70, 82-83; Kubicek, “The Czechs,” 99-100; Richards, “Life Anew,” 260-261; Van Hof, *A History*, 24-25; “Sokol Comes to America.”

³⁷ “Sokol Comes to America.”

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National and four Catholic).³⁸ Tyndall's Tel Jed Sokol ended around 1940.³⁹ In 1963, the only active Sokol was Tabor's Catholic Sokol, which had transitioned into a social club primarily.⁴⁰

The Z.C.B.J., Sokol, Catholic societies, and other Czech organizations often built halls that served multiple uses as theatres, meeting halls, dance halls, movie theaters, and more in turn. Typical spaces included a level-floored main room for seating, dining, dancing, or athletics; a raised stage; a kitchen; and meeting rooms. The focus was typically on function, using common American building types without elaborate detail or exhibiting any particular ethnic building traditions.⁴¹ Their dramatic clubs did plays that used both the Czech language and Czech stories. Comedies were most popular, and music was often incorporated. Many plays had overt messages to reinforce Czech national culture. Clubs got plays "from Czech book agencies or newspapers here and in the east, who in turn obtain them direct from Czechoslovakia. The production rights are obtained when the director purchases as many copies of the play as there are characters in it."⁴² Many stages had a "prompter box" where a prompter could sit under the stage with just their head and shoulders visible to the cast through a hinged-door opening in the floor but hidden from the audience by the door. They had a script and fed lines to the amateur performers.⁴³ As movies became popular and accessible, theater hall owners often started to schedule showings, and many Czech-produced movies circulated to these venues. Public dances were widely popular and often family affairs. Sister Mary Claudia Duratshek, who wrote early histories of the Catholic church in South Dakota, wrote that "it is jokingly said that a Bohemian is born with a fiddle and his first step is a hop."⁴⁴ Popular dances included waltzes, two-steps, polka, square dances, schottisches, and the beseda national folk dance, and "favorite instruments were the cornet, baritone, alto, violin and the ever popular accordion."⁴⁵ Big dances were common ways to celebrate holidays, patron saint days, lodge events, and to end a night after a play, wedding, or baseball tournament.⁴⁶

Over the twentieth century, the English language and American culture grew in influence. Movies and then television claimed most of the audience that had attended amateur plays. Rural to urban demographic shifts changed the talent pool for smaller villages.⁴⁷ For instance, Sokol, plays, and dances continued in Verdigre, NE through the 1930s but the interruption of WWII left the town with only one school program annually.⁴⁸ Z.C.B.J. lodges and Sokol clubs declined in numbers and used the Czech language less. Vladimir Kucera's 1979 history of Czech drama in

³⁸ Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements*, 26-27.

³⁹ Schuurmans, *One Hundred Years*, 89.

⁴⁰ Richards, "Life Anew," 260.

⁴¹ Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks*, 83; Kucera, *Czech Drama*, 11; John E. Rau, "Czechs in South Dakota," in Allen G. Noble, ed., *To Build in a New Land: Ethnic Landscapes in North America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 304.

⁴² Jerabek, "The Transition," 39; Van Hof, *A History*, 30; Kucera, *Czech Drama*, 59.

⁴³ Kubicek, "The Czechs," 135; "Z.C.B.J. Opera House," Clarkson, Nebraska, National Register of Historic Places nomination (#88000948), 7.1.

⁴⁴ Duratshek, *Builders*, 157.

⁴⁵ Kubicek, "The Czechs," 131-132; Van Hof, *A History*, 25.

⁴⁶ Kubicek, "The Czechs," 133, 135-137; Van Hof, *A History*, 25, 30.

⁴⁷ Jerabek, "The Transition," 38; Kucera, *Czech Drama*, 60.

⁴⁸ Kucera, *Czech Drama*, 91.

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Nebraska noted that active dramatic clubs had by then steeply declined in forty communities that used to regularly put on plays—“the stages in the Czech Halls in Nebraska are silent.”⁴⁹ Historian Joseph Chada also wrote that Czechoslovakia’s relationship to the Soviet Union from 1948 to 1989 meant that, because of anti-Communist sentiment in the U.S., American Czechs tended to minimize their contemporary connections to the country, instead focusing on historical traditions as well as their own local history.⁵⁰ As was the case for many ethnic settlement communities in the Midwest, there have been a number of Czech heritage events and organizations formed to preserve cultural traditions, including dance and drama. These heritage events have prioritized perpetuating traditions by engaging the descendants and the community internally, while also attracting and educating their broader audiences. Apart from Tabor’s Czech Days, no similar Czech-focused cultural events continue in South Dakota. The three-day Czech festivals in Wilber (started 1962), Clarkson (started 1964) and Dwight (started 1965) in Nebraska are still annual events at the time of this writing. Other Czech festivals have taken place in Omaha, Lincoln, Verdigre, Prague, Milligan, and York in Nebraska, and a statewide organization called Nebraska Czechs, Inc. connects the current ones. There are also Czech heritage events in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Kansas, and Texas.⁵¹

Other Historic Czech Properties in South Dakota

Across the Czech settlement areas of South Dakota, immigrants and their descendants built homes, farms, churches, and meeting halls that reflected Czech culture, religious practice, and traditional building methods. Around Tabor, there was a Czech Presbyterian church between Tabor and Tyndall; Catholic churches at Dante, Lesterville, and Lakeport; and Z.C.B.J. halls in Tyndall and Utica. Many different venues housed Czech plays by local dramatic groups, musical performances, Czech movie showings, and wedding dances. With Tabor’s Beseda Hall, they were a network of community landmarks for the Czech in southeastern South Dakota. Over the years, several venues have been lost.

Properties representing different aspects of Czech history and architecture in South Dakota have previously been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In Bon Homme County, there are the St. Wenceslaus Church and Parish House, the Old Parish House, and the old log school, in Tabor; Tyndall Z.C.B.J. Hall; and several rural houses, barns, and farmsteads through the 1987 multiple property documentation for “Czech Folk Architecture in Southeastern South Dakota.”⁵² In Yankton County, there are a few farmsteads as well as the former St. John the Baptist Catholic Church at Lakeport that was listed in 1980. Near Kimball in Brule County, the Holy Trinity Church was listed in 1983.

Another property of similar function is the Turner Hall building in Yankton that is extant and part of the Yankton Historic Commercial District. The brick Italianate style building was

⁴⁹ Kucera, *Czech Drama*, 11.

⁵⁰ Chada, *The Czechs*, 215-223.

⁵¹ Kucera, *Czech Drama*, 13; Kucera and Kucera, *Czech Music*, 127; “Czech Festival,” Nebraska Czechs of Wilber, accessed online, 11/20/2023, <http://www.nebraskaczehsofwilber.com/czech-days/>; “2024 Nebraska Czech-Slovak Festivals,” Nebraska Czechs, Inc., accessed online, 21 May 2024, <http://www.nebraskaczehs.org/>.

⁵² All listed in the 1980s. The Joseph V. Wagner House in Tabor is also listed, but for its Queen Anne architecture.

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constructed in 1880 by the German Turnverein society, which—like Czech Sokols—used their hall for gymnastic athletics as well as music and drama performances. By around 1900, German activities had dwindled, and it became the Yankton Opera House Company briefly before being sold to a newspaper company c.1905 for their offices and printing house.⁵³

History of Tabor and Bon Homme County

Bon Homme County was organized by the first territorial legislature in 1862 and located along the Missouri River west of the territorial capital at Yankton. Several creeks crossed the county as they drained south to the Missouri, although the fairly flat area between Tabor and Tyndall was lower than its surroundings and had rich loam soils.⁵⁴ Bon Homme County bordered the Yankton Dakota reservation to the west (what became Charles Mix County) and the Santee Dakota reservation south across the river in Nebraska. A federal military stage road went across the southern end of the county going from the city of Yankton to the Greenwood Agency of the Yankton reservation and to Fort Randall on the west bank of the river. Steamboats and other river trade made stops at several points on the Missouri, while ferry operators brought people and wagons across it. From the 1870 federal census for Bon Homme County (only sixteen pages long), its first settlers had largely Anglo and Yankee backgrounds, with a notable minority of German and Czech birthplaces noted as well. Over the next decade, the Czech concentrated in the southeast part of the county, and there were also Germans from Russia immigrants settled in the north half, Scandinavians in the west, Dutch in the southwest, and a group of Hutterite immigrants from Russia (what is now the Ukraine) had their first colony—the Bon Homme Colony—west of Yankton.⁵⁵ Most available homestead lands in Bon Homme County were claimed by 1881 or 1882.⁵⁶ Chalkstone, a soft limestone, was easily quarried from the Missouri River bluffs and an outcropping east of Scotland. It was used, along with log and lumber from the river bottoms, for early buildings in the county—including the first St. Wenceslaus church building in Tabor. Like much of the state, land in Bon Homme County is largely in agricultural use. Starting in the nineteenth century, farmers raised cattle and grew “wheat, corn, grass, barley, oats, flax and vegetables.”⁵⁷ During harvests, whole families worked day and night to gather grain.⁵⁸ By the early 20th century, there were cattle/dairy, sheep, and hog farms, and corn had outpaced the other crops listed above, with alfalfa and forage crops also gaining a hold.⁵⁹ At points, a few farmers successfully raised fruit like grapes and assorted berries, and Czech settlers were credited with contributions to fruit horticulture through apple and cherry orchards.⁶⁰

⁵³ “A Look at Yankton’s Historic Places: New Series Explores Town’s Historic Public Venues,” *Yankton Press & Dakotan* (SD), 24 July 2014, accessed online, 21 May 2024, https://www.yankton.net/river_city/article_c6c7b8ce-13aa-11e4-9bef-001a4bcf887a.html.

⁵⁴ *Historical Atlas of South Dakota* (Vermillion, SD: E. Frank Peterson, 1904), 124.

⁵⁵ *Historical Atlas* (1904), 124, 179; Doane Robinson, *History of South Dakota*, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Co., 1904), 562.

⁵⁶ *Historical Atlas* (1904), 179.

⁵⁷ *Andreas’ Historical Atlas of Dakota* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1884), 148.

⁵⁸ *Daily Press and Dakotian* (Yankton SD), 27 July 1878.

⁵⁹ *Dakota Huronite* (Huron SD), 10 August 1882, 2 August 1883; *Avon Clarion* (SD), 3 March 1903—17 December 1908; *Historical Atlas* (1904), 124.

⁶⁰ *Dakota Huronite* (Huron SD), 19 July 1883; *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 7 September 1905—15 February 1912; Jennewein and Boorman, *Dakota Panorama*, 116.

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Established in 1881, the Southern State Normal School at Springfield was an important institution for the county during its tenure.⁶¹

Czech settlers arrived in the Tabor area around 1870, and they started farms across three townships.⁶² In 1872, a Catholic Bohemian Literary Society formed by the settlers acquired the northeast quarter of Section 23 for \$200. It was held as a homestead claim by Johanna Kocer and both Kocer and Sophia Janda had previously tried to prove up the parcel. Both women were charter members of the new town. Members John Hakl and Vaclav Janda were named on the purchase documentation, and Joseph Vyborny became the first mayor. Frank Bem surveyed the new 120-acre townsite into fifty-three lots, which the society members drew lots for. There were also forty acres undivided along the south part (later used for the railroad); lots reserved for a church, school, and cemetery; and another reserved for town use—this eventually became the site of Beseda Hall and Sokol Park. The town of Bon Homme was initially the nearest trade center, and the closest mills were in St. Helena, NE or Yankton—so farmers would need about a week to take grain to mill. In 1874, Janda built a grocery store in Tabor, and the town established a post office.⁶³ Early efforts to bring a railroad line to Tabor came to nothing.⁶⁴ By 1892, Tabor included 145 Czech, two German, two Polish, and one English households.⁶⁵

Over the late nineteenth century, Tabor and surrounding agricultural areas faced notable hardships like grasshopper infestations, prairie fires, droughts, and epidemics.⁶⁶ Yet, the town developed a festive reputation—“Tabor claims to be the only town in Dakota that can equal Chicago in drinking, Paris in dancing and Brooklyn in praying.”⁶⁷ Between 1875 and 1887, the newspaper in Yankton reported several times about the all-night “jolly dances” and grand celebrations held in Tabor for the Fourth of July, Czech Catholic holidays, and church events.⁶⁸ One 1880 newspaper account of a dance described “the quaffing of nut brown lager beer, the melody of the Tabor string band, the vociferous gesticulations peculiar to the Bohemian lingo, and the heavy tattoo of flying feet amidst the mazes of the dreamy dance.”⁶⁹ In August 1888, two saloon-halls in town held dances the night after a big Confirmation event at the church. The reporter described the halls as:

⁶¹ It later became the University of South Dakota-Springfield, but ultimately closed in 1984 and was reused as a state prison.

⁶² *Historical Atlas* (1904), 180.

⁶³ The Literary Society did also maintain a small library of Bohemian books, which ended up at the Catholic rectory. *Map of Bon Homme County, South Dakota* (Vermillion: Rowley & Peterson, 1893); Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 42-44, 121-123; Habenicht, *History*, 247; Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements*, 24; Duratschek, *Builders*, 19; Karolevitz, *With Faith*, 25; *Bon Homme County History* (Tyndall: Bon Homme County Historical Society, 1994), 261; *A History of Bon Homme County, South Dakota, Dakota Territory Centennial, 1861-1961* (Scotland SD: Scotland Journal Publishing Co., 1961), 51; Randy Dockendorf, “New Leadership: Tabor’s Beseda Hall Becomes Community-Owned Non-Profit Facility,” *Yankton Press & Dakotan* (SD), 24 November 2022.

⁶⁴ *Press and Daily Dakotian* (Yankton SD), 4 August 1879—22 September 1881.

⁶⁵ Duratschek, *Builders*, 212.

⁶⁶ *Press and Daily Dakotian* (Yankton SD), 7 October 1878, 17 January 1888; Robinson, *History*, vol. 1, 247; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 17; Duratschek, *Builders*, 56, 212.

⁶⁷ *Press and Daily Dakotian* (Yankton SD), 22 September 1881.

⁶⁸ *Press and Daily Dakotian* (Yankton SD), 28 June 1875—29 September 1887.

⁶⁹ *Press and Daily Dakotian* (Yankton SD), 15 December 1880.

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... literally jammed with humanity—women, men and children in like proportions—Some standing, some sitting playing at cards or conversing, but nearly every one of them taking refreshments from quart cups or glasses. At one side stands the counter, behind which are three active men who are kept constantly busy. But this is simply one room. The visitor crosses this, after being almost squashed, and through another door into another room... and he stands rooted to the floor in wonder. The room is one vast assemblage of whirling humanity. Every body is dancing. Old men and women, young men and wives, youths and maidens and children who are not yet old enough to go home alone. Men with their hats on, and coats off, and every couple going round and round, making exactly the same steps and in perfect time. The band plays constantly and always a waltz or polka. Men stamp their feet and shout, women laugh and babies cry and the combination is exciting... And thus they dance and talk and enjoy themselves, sometimes for forty-eight hours at a session. The band finally goes home because it can no longer ‘spiel’ ... Such is a Bohemian ball and it is worth a journey to Tabor to witness one.⁷⁰

The village remained small, with only a store, saloon-dance halls, a church, a school, and the post office until the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad made Tabor a stop on the new branch line they built northwest from Yankton to a point that became the town of Platte—this branch was called “the Platte Line” and completed in 1900.⁷¹ The Literary Society had sold the railroad company the forty undivided acres from their original townsite purchase, and there the line built its depot.⁷² The line enabled new businesses like lumberyards and agricultural shipping, and Tabor boomed, though one account claimed that “the townsite proprietors [would] not sell a lot to any person who [was] not a Catholic.”⁷³ Tabor had a population of around 350 when it incorporated in 1901.⁷⁴

The first public schoolhouse in Tabor was constructed of logs and had pupils enrolled in 1873.⁷⁵ A larger wood-frame building replaced it in 1882. In 1915, the district constructed a two-story white brick building, which accommodated the high school grades that started in 1924.⁷⁶ Enrollment was never large. In 1939, the high school’s graduating class of fourteen was the

⁷⁰ *Press and Daily Dakotian* (Yankton SD), 16 August 1888.

⁷¹ Previously the closest railroad connection was Lesterville, around eight miles away, and the hub market center was Yankton, eighteen miles away by horse and wagon. *Turner County Herald* (Hurley SD), 11 January 1900; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 20 February 1913, 13 July 1939; *Historical Atlas* (1904), 180; Rau, “Czechs,” 288; Steve Plummer, Oral history interview with Louis Charvat, 5 July 1973, SDOHP0777, South Dakota Oral History Project (SDOHP), University of South Dakota, Vermillion.

⁷² The Literary Society then dissolved itself in 1899. Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements*, 24; *Bon Homme County History*, 264.

⁷³ *Turner County Herald* (Hurley SD), 11 January 1900; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 44-45.

⁷⁴ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 6 October 1904; *Historical Atlas* (1904); *Bon Homme County History*, 264.

⁷⁵ Having been subsequently used as a residence, the old log school eventually was brought to a location on Lidice Street where the Tabor Jaycees club restored it and listed it in the National Register of Historic Places. It is a feature of the Czech Heritage Preservation Society’s museum village called Vancura Memorial Park. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 12 October 1933; *Tyndall Tribune* (SD), 22 April 1976; *Bon Homme County History*, 271.

⁷⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 12 October 1933—26 March 1942; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 43; *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 53; *Bon Homme County History*, 272-273.

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largest to date.⁷⁷ In 1948, the high school advertised having four faculty members and, in addition to “a complete music program,” offered courses in algebra, sciences, history, English, business and journalism, typing, and woodworking. The advertisement also said students could request course subjects not listed.⁷⁸ After the 1971 graduating class, the high school was consolidated and moved to nearby Tyndall.⁷⁹

The Catholic church continues to be a landmark of the town and was named for St. Wenceslaus, the patron saint of Bohemia. The Literary Society started the parish in 1871 at the Vaclav Janda house south of town, and it later incorporated in 1884.⁸⁰ Their first building was constructed in 1872-1874 of local chalkstone that parishioners cut from the bluffs along the Missouri River.⁸¹ The current brick edifice was completed in 1898 and consecrated in 1899, with parishioners contributing labor to haul materials from the nearest railroad stop at Lesterville, as well as labor and materials to excavate and build the fieldstone basement.⁸² Like many Czech settlements in South Dakota, the Tabor parish firmly wanted a priest who spoke Czech; they sometimes went without rather than accept one who could not.⁸³ Their first resident priest, Father Joseph Krizek was from Bohemia and came to Tabor in 1877, serving until 1884. He worked with other nearby parishes at the same time also. Others of Irish, German, or Austrian background lasted a maximum of three years.⁸⁴ In late 1892, the bishop sent Father Emmanuel Anton Bouska (Bouška), who was originally from the Tabor district in Bohemia, had been educated in Austria and Switzerland, was ordained in 1889, first worked in the U.S. in Nebraska, and had been serving in Kimball SD.⁸⁵ He remained at Tabor until his death in 1941.⁸⁶ Bouska was succeeded in January 1942 by the Benedictine priest Father Raymond Koman.⁸⁷ Though English services started to be held, Koman gave sermons in Czech until his passing in 1965.⁸⁸

In 1902, the Catholic parish started construction of a brick grade school (academy), with Benedictine Sisters from Yankton serving as teachers and staff. The town wanted the school to feature instruction in Czech, and the first Czech-speaking teacher was Theresia Nesvacil (Sister

⁷⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 27 April 1939.

⁷⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 2 September 1948.

⁷⁹ *Tabor Centennial Pageant: The First 100 Years, 1872-1972*, June 18-19, 1972 (Scotland Journal Print, 1972), 10; *Bon Homme County History*, 273.

⁸⁰ Dennis L. Povondra, *A Pictorial Review of Religious Symbols and History: St. Wenceslaus Catholic Parish, Tabor, South Dakota, USA, 1990* (Self-published, 1989), 3.

⁸¹ Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 124; *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 51; Povondra, *A Pictorial Review*, 8.

⁸² St. Wenceslaus Church and Parish House were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 13 July 1939; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 125-126; Duratschek, *Builders*, 35; Karolevitz, *With Faith*, 24-25; Povondra, *A Pictorial Review*, 10-12.

⁸³ Duratschek, *Builders*, 157, 212; Karolevitz, *With Faith*, 82.

⁸⁴ Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 129; Duratschek, *Builders*, 52, 56.

⁸⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 May 1939; Doane Robinson, *History of South Dakota*, vol. 2 (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Co., 1904), 1213; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 135; Duratschek, *Builders*, 212; Karolevitz, *With Faith*, 126; *Bon Homme County History*, 275.

⁸⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 20 February 1941—17 February 1941; Karolevitz, *With Faith*, 126.

⁸⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 22 January 1942; Duratschek, *Builders*, 420.

⁸⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 July 1941—26 December 1946; “St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church and Parish House,” Tabor, South Dakota, National Register of Historic Places nomination (#84000579); *Bon Homme County History*, 273.

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Wenceslaus), who started in 1903. Around that time, about one third of the pupils were from rural areas and boarded at the school, and the parish built a dormitory in 1904.⁸⁹ A new St. Wenceslaus school was built in 1961, but enrollment continued to fall, and the Benedictine Sisters withdrew in 1969. Lay teachers continued the school for two years until it fully closed in 1971.⁹⁰ The building has since been occupied by the public elementary school.⁹¹

The Czech Presbyterians in the area also formed a congregation in 1883 and built a rural church of chalkstone between Tabor and Tyndall to the west, where they had previously established a cemetery in 1878. In 1914, they constructed a new frame church, which they used until 1953 when the church and rectory buildings were moved into Tyndall.⁹²

Opened in 1902 to capitalize on the railroad connection, Tabor's flour mill was a prominent business and competed with the mill run by the Hutterite colony seven miles to the southwest along the Missouri River. Tabor's mill operated until about 1920, and, after it closed, the Hutterites bought the building material.⁹³ Three grain elevators operated at the rail line by the autumn of 1904.⁹⁴ At least into the 1940s, Tabor had elevators at the rail line that took in grain, storing it for transportation to mills elsewhere.⁹⁵

In 1904, W.A. Glasner started the town's first newspaper, the *Bon Homme County Independent*, which Joseph A. and Anna Dvorak bought in February 1905. They renamed it the *Tabor Independent* in 1913.⁹⁶ Anna Dvorak was owner of record and did typesetting, and her husband J.A. Dvorak was editor and publisher.⁹⁷ He published one to two pages in each issue in Czech, which was usually a close translation of the English-language local and state news items from the same issue. Except for a few months at the end of 1919, the Dvoraks held on through the Depression and WWII, running the paper through 1950.⁹⁸ A group of local businessmen then bought the paper. A mother and daughter, Hattie and Gail Hatwan, gathered local news, arranged advertising, and managed subscriptions, and a newspaper editor in Scotland SD printed it. The paper soon ceased publication completely—the South Dakota State Archives have issues through much of 1951 and one issue from 1953.⁹⁹

⁸⁹ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 20 October 1904; *Omaha Daily Bee* (NE), 23 August 1902; Robinson, *History*, vol. 2, 1213; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 43; Duratschek, *Builders*, 212-213; *Bon Homme County History*, 275.

⁹⁰ Duratschek, *Builders*, 420; Karolevitz, *With Faith*, 76, 154; *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 55; *Tabor Centennial Pageant*, 10.

⁹¹ Povondra, *A Pictorial Review*, 22.

⁹² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 25 November 1909—5 November 1914; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 163-164; *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 55; *Bon Homme County History*, 268.

⁹³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 December 1928; Plummer, Charvat oral history; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 45; *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 53; *Bon Homme County History*, 265.

⁹⁴ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 6 October 1904.

⁹⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 19 February 1942.

⁹⁶ *Duluth Evening Herald* (MN), 5 January 1905; *Bon Homme County History*, 269.

⁹⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 28 September 1933—28 September 1944.

⁹⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 25 September 1919—7 September 1950; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (MN), 9 October 1919.

⁹⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 28 December 1950—13 December 1951, 23 July 1953.

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In the first issue of the *Independent* in 1904, a long description of the town praised the agricultural opportunity in the region, as well as the respectability provided by the institutions of its Catholic church and its academy. Businesses listed included a bank, three general stores, four saloons, hardware, drug store, milliners, physicians, barber, blacksmith, lumber yards, liveries, the flour mill, and elevators. From advertisements over a few of the first issues, there were also soon a trained midwife, a clothing store, a jeweler, livestock dealers, meat market, and a furniture dealer/undertaker. Also in 1904, Tabor built a water system with a water tower for firefighting and a new gas plant for fueling streetlights.¹⁰⁰ In 1916-1917, the town built a municipal electric plant and light system as well as a new town hall, which also housed the fire company's equipment.¹⁰¹ In 1920, two additions at the south end of town created lots for new residential construction.¹⁰²

Beer and saloons were a popular part of the social and cultural life in Czech and German areas of settlement. Those communities tended to oppose temperance or prohibition legislation.¹⁰³ At the time of statehood in 1889, South Dakota enacted prohibition to restrict the sale and consumption of alcohol, but it proved hard to enforce and was repealed in 1896. During eras of prohibition, some Czech households produced beer for their own use.¹⁰⁴ When prohibition became a serious prospect again leading up to the 1916 election, the Tabor newspaper opposed it. It ran advertisements for the South Dakota Local Option league and printed editorial comments saying that prohibition was not something that "the free born people of a free country can tolerate."¹⁰⁵ Prohibition did pass in 1916 and was set to begin on July 1, 1917. The night before that, Sturma and Blazek halls in Tabor each held a "last dance before prohibition," and the July 5th issue of the *Independent* reflected that "last Saturday when the saloons closed their door... the band turned out and played with unusual feeling that wonderful song, 'How Dry I Am' that strong men wept as children."¹⁰⁶ Federal prohibition ended in 1933. That August, after federal law had legalized lower alcohol "non-intoxicating" 3.2 beer and South Dakota had passed its correlating legislation, Tabor businesses were soon advertising 3.2 beer on offer.¹⁰⁷ Beseda Hall applied for and received a retail sale liquor license that November.¹⁰⁸ Eventually, higher concentrations were legalized. In May 1935, Tabor passed its intoxicating liquor ordinance to license its sale in town once again.¹⁰⁹

As the automobile became important to transportation, county government had responsibility for road and bridge construction and, in 1914, a group of citizens created the Bon Homme County

¹⁰⁰ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 6 October 1904—15 December 1904; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 45.

¹⁰¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 14 September 1916—26 April 1917.

¹⁰² *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 55.

¹⁰³ Kubicek, "The Czechs," 113; Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks*, 70; Frank Van Nuys, "Immigrants and Politics in South Dakota, 1861-1930," p.51, in Jon K. Lauck et al., eds. *The Plains Political Tradition: Essays on South Dakota Political Culture*, vol. 1. Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Kubicek, "The Czechs," 142; Van Hof, *A History*, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Many drugstore medicines in the era had a high alcohol content. *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 23 April 1908; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 17 August 1916—2 November 1916.

¹⁰⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 21 June 1917—5 July 1917.

¹⁰⁷ 3.2 beer contains 3.2% alcohol by weight. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 17 August 1933.

¹⁰⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 2 November 1933.

¹⁰⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 June 1935.

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Auto Association to advocate for improvements.¹¹⁰ The state highway commission surveyed out a new highway, and Tabor's leaders were active in ensuring the route included their town. S.D. Highway 50 initially ran along the east side of town. It was a gravel road until concrete paving started in sections in the early 1940s.¹¹¹ Tabor residents had also been very interested in the construction of the Meridian Bridge over the Missouri River at Yankton, which would be a reliable connection to Nebraska. In 1924, Rev. Bouska attended the bridge's opening ceremony, and J.A. Dvorak wrote a march called "The Meridian Highway Bridge" for use at the event.¹¹² In 1928, a new bus line started operating from Yankton to Platte through Tabor and buses ran to Yankton at least through the 1940s.¹¹³ In 1931, the railroad discussed closing smaller stations on the Platte Line, including Tabor, or cutting daily passenger routes; in 1932, they did reduce freight service to three days per week.¹¹⁴ Increasingly, trucks carried livestock, machinery, grain, gravel, and more to markets on the improving highways. In 1950, the Post Office shifted to bringing mail to Tabor by truck (rather than rail), and the railroad discontinued passenger trains on the Platte Line.¹¹⁵ In 1955, after freight service also ended, the depot at Tabor was dismantled. Lidice Street—which had until then terminated at the depot—was extended to join S.D. Highway 50, which the state had re-routed to curve across south of town.¹¹⁶

Like most South Dakota towns, social and fraternal organizations like the Modern Woodmen of America were popular in Tabor in the early twentieth century. Several of those that endured were explicitly focused on Czech culture. One was Tabor's Z.C.B.J. Lodge, Hvezda Zapadu No. 41 (Star of the West). It had started as a C.S.P.S. lodge in 1885 and was one of the lodges that transferred to the Z.C.B.J. when it split off in 1897. Then having twenty-one members, the lodge had grown to 183 members in 1920.¹¹⁷ Additional organizations were connected to the Catholic Church. There were the Katolicky Delnik / Catholic Workman Branch 93, the Katolicka Jednota Sokols (K.J.S.) / Catholic Unified Sokols Branch 46 (both discussed in detail later), the Society of St. Wenceslaus (Z.K.J.) and Knights of St. Wenceslaus, the Society of St. Ludmila No. 106, and the Altar and Rosary Society. In the spring of 1920, the Kortan-Hatwan Post No. 183 of the American Legion formed in Tabor, and their Auxiliary organized in 1935.¹¹⁸ In 1913, twenty local businessmen organized a Tabor Commercial Club (later Tabor Chamber of Commerce), though it had to be re-organized a few times, such as in 1928 and 1935.¹¹⁹ The state Extension

¹¹⁰ *Bon Homme County History*, 323-325.

¹¹¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 3 August 1916—14 August 1941.

¹¹² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 8 November 1923—3 July 1924; Karolevitz, *With Faith*, 104.

¹¹³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 27 September 1928—12 May 1949.

¹¹⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 June 1931—17 November 1932.

¹¹⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 July 1950—28 December 1950.

¹¹⁶ *Tabor Centennial Pageant*, 10; *Bon Homme County History*, 265.

¹¹⁷ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), February 13, 1908; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 47-50; Křížan, *Souvenir*, 19; *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 55; *Bon Homme County History*, 265.

¹¹⁸ It was named for two local young men, Stanislav / Stanley Kortan and Charles Hatwan, who had died of influenza in service in France in 1918. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 25 March 1920—9 June 1921; *Bon Homme County History*, 277.

¹¹⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 27 February 1913—5 December 1935.

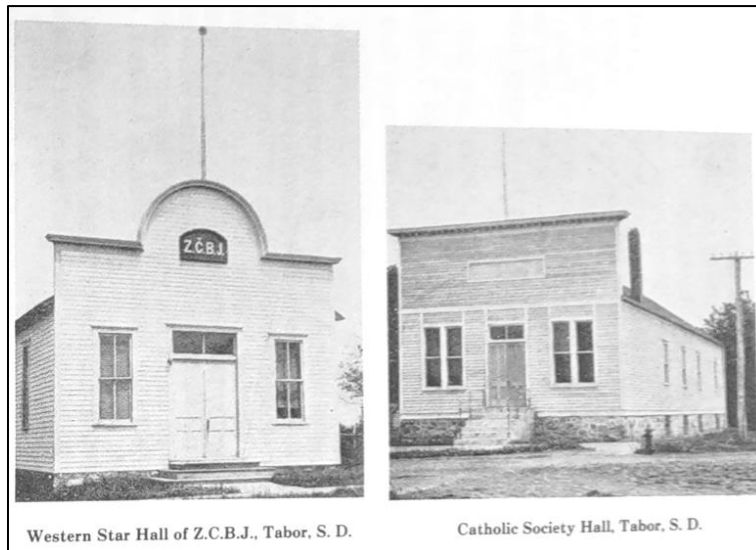
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Service supported women's clubs in Tabor over the early twentieth century. For youth, there was 4-H, Boy and Girl Scouts (off and on), and school-affiliated sports, music, and arts clubs.¹²⁰



Joseph A. Dvořák, comp. *Memorial Book: History of the Czechs in the State of South Dakota*. Edward M. Bubak, ed., and Laddie E. Kostel, trans., (Tabor SD: Czech Heritage Preservation Society, [1920] 1980), 130.

Recreation in Tabor centered on the dance and meeting halls built in town. Although the Opera House / Beseda Hall became the largest and most enduring event venue in Tabor, there were several others. Starting in 1876, three or four different saloon owners in Tabor ran dance halls connected to their businesses. For instance, Blazek's business had a false-front wood frame building with saloon on the ground floor, rooms to rent on the upper floor, and a wide adjoining building that was the dance hall.¹²¹ Commercial dance halls were also used for town elections and caucuses, farmers' cooperative meetings, political rallies, travelling lecturers, and boxing matches. In the early 1920s, there was briefly a permanent open-air dance platform, or bowery, built at a spot called John's Park.¹²² The Catholic organizations had put up their first meeting hall in 1885, where "they could meet and where they could entertain themselves and forget about the hardships and sufferings of this life."¹²³ They built a larger Society Hall in 1904, which had an auditorium and was used for fellowship after mass, dances, concerts, dramatics, medicine/vaudeville shows, funeral gatherings, farmers' institutes, and more until its sale and reuse in 1931 (after the lodges bought the Opera House).¹²⁴ The Z.C.B.J. lodge built a wood-

¹²⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 7 June 1917—26 March 1942; *Tabor Centennial Pageant*, 10.

¹²¹ All were demolished or remodeled for other commercial uses by 1939. *Daily Press and Dakotian* (Yankton SD), 27 June 1876—10 August 1878; *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 3 November 1904—15 June 1905; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 9 March 1939; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 44.

¹²² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 14 July 1921—14 September 1922.

¹²³ Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 138.

¹²⁴ J.A. Dvorak bought the first building to use behind his house as a printing shop for the newspaper. *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 3 November 1904—4 February 1909; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 2 January 1913—13 July 1939; Robinson, *History*, vol. 2, 1214; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 138-139; Povondra, *A Pictorial Review*, 9; *Bon Homme County History*, 265.

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frame false-front hall in 1901. In 1948, they moved to a new concrete-block hall with a full basement and stage auditorium.¹²⁵ Both Z.C.B.J. buildings are extant but have been extensively remodeled for other uses. In 1946, the American Legion and Auxiliary posts bought and remodeled the Jos. Skerpik building for their clubhouse.¹²⁶ Other venues in town had space for meetings and small events but not space for large social dances or concerts. When completed in 1917, Tabor's town hall hosted elections, community meetings, women's Extension clubs (supported by the state agricultural college), and more.¹²⁷ The schools, church women's organization, and Extension clubs also could use dining or assembly rooms in the schools. Additional recreational facilities in Tabor have included the baseball field at Lincoln Park that was first used in 1922; occasional horseshoe pitches, bowling alleys, and ice-skating rinks; and a swimming pool that opened in 1970 at Takota (Ta-Kota) Park at Yankton and Springfield Streets.¹²⁸

Tabor's local dance bands (kapely) and orchestras had a big role in the social, civic, and religious life of the town. In addition to playing for public dances, local bands played for town carnivals, various processions and parades, weddings, and funeral marches.¹²⁹ Matt / Matej Petrik, J. A. Dvorak, and Joseph "Jerry" Jarolim (all Czech immigrants) had notable impacts in forming and directing a Tabor band, orchestra, concert band, and municipal band over the years.¹³⁰ Petrik's work as a musician helped his family's income when they first came to the area.¹³¹ When Dvorak's new concert band formed in 1905, the paper noted that two of the eighteen members had played in military bands in Austria earlier in their life.¹³² From newspaper coverage, the bands were typically comprised of six to nine men from town or nearby farms. They appear to have formed and re-formed as talent, interest, and availability fluctuated over time, and Dvorak's 1920 history said that "of course the members changed continually."¹³³

¹²⁵ The 1901 building was on the north side of E. Chicago St. between Viborny and Hakl Streets. Their 1948 building was on S. Hakl St. south of Chicago St. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 15 April 1948—18 November 1948; "Public Facilities Map 1942," Public Service Facilities Survey, University of South Dakota Extension Division, Richardson Collection, I.D. Weeks Library, University of South Dakota, Vermillion; Rau, "Czechs," 304; *Bon Homme County History*, 265.

¹²⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 May 1946—12 December 1946.

¹²⁷ Town hall, with 1949 pump house addition, is still extant. It currently primarily used for storage, but also houses the town's ambulance and has public restrooms.

¹²⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 May 1922—14 December 1933; *Tabor Centennial Pageant*, 10; *B-Y's Lines Salutes Tabor Centennial*, Bon Homme-Yankton Electric Association Inc., June 1972, in "Tabor," Vertical File, S.D. State Archives, Pierre; *Bon Homme County History*, 278.

¹²⁹ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 17 November 1904—18 May 1911; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 21 May 1914—16 October 1941.

¹³⁰ Petrik came to Tabor in 1872 and started a Tabor band that year; he also composed music. Dvorak arrived in Tabor in 1890, was long-time editor of the *Independent*, a popular speaker, involved with local dramatics, and began composing music around 1925. Jarolim also was part of an Army orchestra during his WWI service; played with the WNAX radio studio orchestra; and worked with bands in surrounding towns like Tyndall, Utica, and Yankton. *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), October 26, 1905; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 24 January 1918—7 September 1950; Křižan, *Souvenir*, 20; *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 57; *Bon Homme County History*, 269.

¹³¹ Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 94.

¹³² *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 1 June 1905; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 11 January 1951.

¹³³ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 10 August 1905—14 May 1908; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 46

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Bands commonly traveled to neighboring towns to play at more dances and other events too, and that was a source of town pride. For one Fourth of July, the *Tabor Independent* reported that “our musicians will furnish Utica with a large street band; a small brass band for the dance on the bowery and an orchestra for their hall. Tabor is a musical town.”¹³⁴ In 1906, the Tabor band made a tour that also included stops in Nebraska and Kansas. In 1912 and 1913, they made special tours of towns along the railroad’s Platte Line.¹³⁵ In 1922, Tabor started a municipal street band who gave open-air concerts on Saturdays during the summer and a bandstand was built for them. Later, they performed in Sokol Park or along the main street in front of Kortan’s Garage.¹³⁶ In 1927, the Tabor Band celebrated their 25th anniversary with a dance tour for which they performed in “old time Bohemian costumes.”¹³⁷ After WNAX radio started in Yankton, the station frequently scheduled Tabor bands and orchestras for broadcasts from 1927 into the 1930s.¹³⁸



The Tabor Dance Band which will celebrate its 25th anniversary by giving a number of dances in several towns dressed in Bohemian costumes.

Tabor Independent (SD), 30 June 1927.



Matt Petrik’s Tabor 1890 Band, and Joe Jarolim’s 1932 Tabor Bohemian Band. Collections of the Czech Heritage Preservation Society, Inc.

¹³⁴ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 20 June 1907.

¹³⁵ *Wilberské listy* (Wilber NE), 14 February 1906; *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 25 January 1912—9 January 1913.

¹³⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 March 1922—19 July 1951.

¹³⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 June 1927—30 June 1927.

¹³⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 17 March 1927—13 August 1936.

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During the agricultural recession of the 1920s and the Great Depression of the 1930s, Tabor faced its full share of difficulties, including the failure of the Tabor State Bank (twice), dust storms, grasshopper plagues, drought years, agricultural and market conditions, and navigating the many federal relief and supply-reduction programs being offered.¹³⁹ One of the first large dust storms came on a Sunday in November 1933 and lasted about ten hours. As the *Independent* described it, “the darkest moments were at about three o’clock, when it was almost as dark as night” and the dust was “as fine as flour... and being forced thru the smallest crevice or opening in dwellings, covered every article within.”¹⁴⁰ One 1936 article in the *Independent* about recent grasshopper attacks and drought concluded that “such is farm life. Work, work and nothing but work, and all for nothing.”¹⁴¹ Cash money was often in short supply and to keep more of its subscribers, the *Independent* publicized that they would take stove-wood, grains, vegetables, fowl, and more in lieu of cash.¹⁴² In reaction to the many hardships of the era, a township Farm Union Local re-formed in April 1930, the Red Cross and federal government distributed direct relief of food and clothing, and supporters of the Farmers’ Holiday movement formed a county organization to support the 1932 strike and other activism.¹⁴³ Area farmers eventually could access federal New Deal agricultural relief and subsidy programs through the Agricultural Adjustment Act. Many Tabor men joined work relief programs like the “reforestation army” of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Public Works Administration tree planting around town, and Works Progress Administration (WPA) construction projects. Women worked for WPA sewing projects, and local high schoolers could join the National Youth Administration (NYA) rolls.¹⁴⁴ In May 1940, an indication of the recovering economy, the Farmers & Merchants State Bank of Scotland opened an office in Tabor.¹⁴⁵

In the South Dakota travel guide published in 1938 by the WPA, the description of Tabor focused on its Czech culture. It detailed the use of the language, Sokols, costumed beseda folk dance, dramatics, and wedding dances. Housewives got credit for the quality of food, including koláče / kolache (sweet pastries), pork, potato dumplings, sauerkraut, and beer.¹⁴⁶

In the lead-up to World War II, military draft registrations in Tabor started in October 1940.¹⁴⁷ Twelve men from Tabor joined Battery E of the 117th Field Artillery of the S.D. Army National Guard, who left from Yankton that November for training in California.¹⁴⁸ When the U.S. entered the war, many more local young men joined the military. Others in town left for defense work opportunities elsewhere in South Dakota or in cities like Chicago and Omaha. In town, the schools and Boy Scouts collected scrap paper and metal, there were many drives for the Red

¹³⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 September 1925—3 October 1940.

¹⁴⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 November 1933.

¹⁴¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 July 1936.

¹⁴² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 22 December 1932—19 September 1935.

¹⁴³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 3 April 1930—8 May 1941.

¹⁴⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 18 May 1933—19 December 1940.

¹⁴⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 May 1940.

¹⁴⁶ Kolaches are a circular Czech pastry with cream cheese or fruit preserves at the center. Federal Writer’s Project, Works Progress Administration, *A South Dakota Guide* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, [1938] 2005), 355-356.

¹⁴⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 October 1940.

¹⁴⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 28 November 1940.

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Cross and war bond sales, ration books were distributed, blackout drills with sirens were practiced, and shifts of women worked to sew surgical dressings.¹⁴⁹ People in town could hear distant detonations from the U.S. Army Air Corps' bomber and gunnery practice ranges along the Missouri River bottoms between Yankton and Springfield.¹⁵⁰ Local town residents, farmwives, Japanese and German prisoners of war, and men recruited from Mexico provided supplementary farm labor in Bon Homme and surrounding counties.¹⁵¹ Though the town still held a few dances a year, there were fewer men to play in the bands, and fewer traveled because of restrictions on gasoline and tires. Some families of servicemen had the newspaper publish updates they received or even their letters in full.¹⁵² In 1942, Tabor's main street was renamed from Chechie Street to Lidice Street as a memorial to the Czech village of Lidice that had been destroyed by Nazi Germany that June.¹⁵³ After the war, several in town received letters from relatives in Czechoslovakia describing the hardships and cruel treatment experienced while living under German occupation.¹⁵⁴ In May 1946, St. Wenceslaus parish mailed sixty cases of canned foods to Czechoslovakia as aid.¹⁵⁵

Of importance in this era were the large federal dams built on the Missouri River, which changed the landscape and generated hydroelectric power. Though proposals for dams had started earlier in the 1940s, the Pick-Sloan Act in 1944 authorized the construction of five major dams on the river. In 1942, Tabor's Commercial Club had supported an early Gavin's Point Dam proposal that intended to provide electrical power, irrigation, and recreation opportunities.¹⁵⁶ Similar benefits were anticipated for the nearby Fort Randall and Gavin's Point dams as they came to be built in 1946-1956 and 1952-1957 respectively. Power generated from Fort Randall had tremendous impact on the use of electricity in the region. By 1947, the Bon Homme-Yankton Electric Association, working through the federal Rural Electrification Administration (REA), had opened its headquarters office in Tabor. Tabor began working out the special elections and franchises needed to turn over its municipal electric plant to the co-operative. They made massive outreach efforts to get town and rural property owners to convert or install their own wiring to work with the new lines that got built out from the dam over the following several years. In August 1951, the REA energized the new lines and moved into their new Tabor offices in the remodeled old light plant.¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 29 January 1942—29 June 1944.

¹⁵⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 14 January 1943; *Bon Homme County History*, 354-356.

¹⁵¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 5 August 1943—29 March 1945.

¹⁵² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 25 February 1943—5 July 1945.

¹⁵³ As a "somewhat arbitrary" choice of reprisal for the assassination of the acting governor of Bohemia and Moravia, Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi government had around 193 men of Lidice killed, sent many of the women to concentration camps, killed or sent the children to German orphanages, and destroyed its buildings. Cwach, "Czech Immigration," 4; "Lidice: The Annihilation of a Czech Town," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed online, 20 November 2023, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lidice>.

¹⁵⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 December 1945—21 March 1946.

¹⁵⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 23 May 1946.

¹⁵⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 23 April 1942.

¹⁵⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 2 January 1947—2 August 1951; *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 50, 55.

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Additionally in the late 1940s, Tabor replaced its water tower and built a new connecting well and pump house, which was attached to the town hall.¹⁵⁸ In 1947, a new local Farmers State Bank opened.¹⁵⁹ In 1956, Tabor got a new sewage system and a new dial telephone system. In 1960, a new brick front post office was built on Lidice St.¹⁶⁰ By 1994, Tabor had a new library and a community center that was also used for senior citizens meeting space.¹⁶¹

In Tabor, the use of the Czech language was still common for everyday business in the early 1940s, and sermons in Czech continued until the early 1960s.¹⁶² The Dvoraks continued to have a section in Czech in their *Independent* newspaper until they retired at the end of 1950.¹⁶³

In 1975, local residents formed the Czech Heritage Preservation Society under president Laddie E. Kostel “to take up the mission of the bygone fraternal societies.”¹⁶⁴ The society has since sponsored picnics, programs and plays on local history, and classes on the Czech language.¹⁶⁵ Along with also being a sponsor of Tabor’s annual Czech Days festival, the society maintains Vancura Memorial Park, located south of Beseda Hall across Chicago St., which has a collection of historic buildings and a small museum/archive building.

History of Beseda Hall and Sokol Park

Property and Ownership

Beseda Hall

The oldest section of Beseda Hall is the main hall with tall gabled ceiling and stage. It originated as part of a saloon, dance hall, and inn built by František (Frank) E. Reidinger in the fall of 1904. Initially, it was a wood frame building fronted on Tabor’s main commercial street. It had a false-front façade and an upper balcony. The saloon was in front, with the rooms for rent above that, and the dance hall in a tall one-story rear section. It was initially known as the Wayside Inn or Reidinger’s hall, and in the first years it advertised carrying liquor, cigars, and beer on tap. Since beer was sourced from the C. & J. Michel Brewing Co. of La Crosse, Wisconsin, it became known as Michel hall.¹⁶⁶ In the summer of 1905, Reidinger sold the saloon and dance hall to Vaclav J. Wagner and Matěj (Matt) B. Welfl, and Welfl took over the full ownership in 1906.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 7 August 1947—14 July 1949.

¹⁵⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 1 May 1947.

¹⁶⁰ *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 55.

¹⁶¹ *Bon Homme County History*, 261.

¹⁶² Chada, *The Czechs*, 19.

¹⁶³ Richards, “Life Anew,” 259; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 28 December 1950.

¹⁶⁴ Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 10; *Bon Homme County History*, 284; Rau, “Czechs,” 304-305; “Laddie Kostel, Sr., 1912-2002,” Obituaries, Bon Homme County, accessed online, 13 May 2024, <http://www.bonhomme.sdgenweb.com/obits014.htm>.

¹⁶⁵ Rau, “Czechs,” 305; *Bon Homme County History*, 284.

¹⁶⁶ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 20 October 1904—3 August 1911.

¹⁶⁷ By 1908, F.E. Reidinger had moved to Kadoka where he had a land agent business and a billiard hall. Welfl and Wagner had previously worked in a furniture business together briefly in 1905. M.B. Welfl also had a tavern on Block 8 in 1909-1913, was treasurer of the Tabor Commercial Club in 1913, and had a business interest in local automobile companies in 1913-1914 and 1917. *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 13 April 1905—20

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The Star Restaurant operated from the front street level part of the building starting in 1908. Through 1915, women operated the restaurant primarily, including Marie Melmer, Anna Gardner King, Anna Turek, Mrs. John Honner, and Josephine Kondelik.¹⁶⁸ Melmer had advertised her new business as a restaurant and lunch room. In 1915, Dale Hampton and Buck Turner bought the Star Restaurant, and they advertised having regular and short order meals served at all hours.¹⁶⁹

In 1917, Jan Matuška (John Matuska) and Teofil (Theo) Koletzky bought Michel hall.¹⁷⁰ In the spring of 1918, they started a major project to enlarge the dance hall into an opera house. In April, the paper reported that “Chas. Petrik and his crew of men have cut the Michel hall in half this week and moved one half 13 feet away, thus broadening the hall... When completed the hall will be spacious enough for any crowd that may come to Tabor.”¹⁷¹ The project added width and length to the hall. Their expansion included a stage, reported to be forty-three feet wide, with a basement beneath it, as well as the installation of electric lights and fans.

Koletzky sold his interest to Charles J. Rokusek in July 1919.¹⁷² Matuska and Rokusek retained ownership until 1930. From at least 1919 into the 1930s, Matuska had his barber shop in a one-story annex attached to the south front side of the Opera House.¹⁷³ In the 1920s, occupants of the front rooms included an insurance business, a creamery, and a cream/produce buyer.¹⁷⁴

February 1908; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 27 February 1913—19 June 1919; *Kadoka Press* (SD), 1 January 1909—2 February 1912.

¹⁶⁸ Melmer (maiden name Kostel) had had a millinery business earlier in Avon and then Tabor before opening the restaurant. She later married again to Joseph Pobuda and moved to Lake Andes. King was active with Tabor’s Red Cross in 1917-1920. The Tureks moved to Deadwood in 1918. The Honners farmed by Olivet and Dante, and had a pool hall in Geddes. Kondelik married John Stanec and moved to Tyndall in 1915. *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 20 August 1908—16 September 1909; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 30 October 1913—13 November 1924.

¹⁶⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 18 November 1915.

¹⁷⁰ Matuska was a barber starting about 1900; he also had a bowling alley in 1905, worked an automobile livery in 1912-1917, and had several terms as town marshal. As detailed later, he started running movies in Tabor with Dale Hampton in 1914, which they moved into the Michel hall building in late 1915. He continued to have a barber shop in various locations, with Oscar Janda as manager for a time in 1916-1920 and 1921, and Benjamin “Bennie” Jacobs, a Black “porter,” advertising his services (cleaning/pressing clothes, cleaning hats, and shining shoes) at the shop in 1916. T. Koletzky had been active in town government, had worked for the farmers’ elevator and a threshing crew, and played on the local baseball team. *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 13 October 1904—22 August 1912; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 31 July 1913—17 June 1920.

¹⁷¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 14 February 1918—9 May 1918.

¹⁷² Rokusek had been a mail carrier eight years until serving in a military band in France and Belgium during WWI. *Omaha Daily Bee* (NE), 8 January 1910; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 18 July 1918—3 July 1919.

¹⁷³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 17 April 1919—9 June 1932.

¹⁷⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), September 11, 1924—May 23, 1929.

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1. The Opera House with annex and the adjoining Thompson Lumber Yards. *B-Y's Lines Salutes Tabor Centennial*, Bon Homme-Yankton Electric Association Inc., June 1972, in "Tabor," Vertical File, S.D. State Archives, Pierre.
2. Beseda Hall, c.1938, collection of the Czech Heritage Preservation Society, Inc.

Looking for a larger space than their Society Hall building, the Catholic Workman lodge and the Catholic Sokol bought the Opera House from Rokusek and Matuska in April 1930, renaming it Beseda Hall (Beseda Sín in Czech).¹⁷⁵ Rev. Bouska, a member of the Workman lodge, was reported in one local history to have been influential in the decision to buy the hall.¹⁷⁶ They elected officers, an advisory committee, a manager, and a janitor/custodian to oversee the hall.¹⁷⁷ Their first work projects for the building included the purchase of 400 additional chairs and re-arranging the stage. There was talk of plans to replace the wood-frame front part of the building with a brick structure, even to the point of finding recycled masonry, but that project was not completed at the time.¹⁷⁸ In 1934, Anton Koupal, Anton Vancura, and several other men laid a new metal roof and installed two large ventilators with suction fans. After a wedding dance that summer, the ventilators were deemed "money well spent." They also made repairs to the interior plaster that had been damaged by leaks. During that work, the paper reported that Laddie Kostel painted various scenes on the walls.¹⁷⁹ In 1936, carpenter Anton Vancura remodeled the front entrance, adding a ticket booth.¹⁸⁰ In 1938, the hall installed a new amplifier (loudspeaker) and a

¹⁷⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 14 October 1926—12 February 1931.

¹⁷⁶ *Bon Homme County History*, 275.

¹⁷⁷ For instance, in 1936, L.A. Cimpl was president, Edmund A. Wagner was secretary, A.G. Honner was hall manager, and Joseph M. Soukup was janitor. Other managers have included A.P. Rokusek, B.O. Hroza, Bly and Hermina Kloucek, Willard Matuska, Lillian Sestak, Raymond and Delores Raabe, and Bernard and Helen Zitka, and custodians have included Tom Kloucek. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 23 January 1936—25 January 1951; "Helen Scherschligt Kaiser," Find-a-Grave, accessed online 11 March 2024 <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/99243349/helen-kaiser>; "Hermina Kloucek, 1918-2006," "Raymond Raabe, 1924-2008," "Lillian Sestak, 1920-2008," and "Willard Matuska, 1915-2002," Obituaries, Bon Homme County, accessed online 10 May 2024, <http://www.bonhomme.sdgenweb.com/obits.htm>.

¹⁷⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 April 1930—12 February 1931.

¹⁷⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 24 May 1934—21 June 1934.

¹⁸⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 9 April 1936.

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crew built the balcony.¹⁸¹ J.A. Dvorak is credited with painting scenery backdrops for Beseda Hall at an undetermined date, possibly the drops that are still at the hall.¹⁸²

In the spring of 1950, several local men worked to replace the floor in Beseda Hall, while a crew of Lawrence Koupal's worked on remodeling the walls and ceiling, paneling them with Nu-Wood. Other work at the time included a new proscenium frame, new dividing draw curtain, and modernized lighting.¹⁸³ In 1951, the Catholic lodges continued to raise funds for the new hall floor and remodeling, as well as a new furnace and chimney.¹⁸⁴

In the fall of 1955, the front part of the building that had initially housed the saloon, restaurant, and inn was removed and replaced with a brick tile structure on a concrete block basement, constructed by the local Lawrence Koupal Construction Co.¹⁸⁵ This new entrance to the hall had a ticket booth at the entrance and a kitchen on the main floor. The ticket booth was removed in 1999. The basement had restrooms, a utility/laundry room, and a large room used as social space.

In 1972, the north windows on the auditorium section were replaced with smaller units. On the south side, a concrete platform built for a town centennial pageant was built into a full addition with concrete block walls for more seating and larger restrooms. In 1992, an open performance patio with concrete floor and metal canopy, with concrete access ramps, was built onto the south side of the 1972 addition.¹⁸⁶

The Catholic Sokol, which had become a social branch in 1931 and the Catholic Social Club in 1954, finally disbanded in 1972. In 2004, the First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association (FCSLA Life) succeeded the Catholic Workman branch and continued to hold meetings in and manage the hall. In 2022, ownership of the hall and park transferred from FCSLA Life to Beseda Hall, Inc., a non-profit in which all residents, civic organizations, and businesses in Tabor are members.¹⁸⁷

Sokol Park

Comprising the south half of Lot 2, Sokol Park was bought in 1931 by the Catholic societies, particularly the Katolicka Jednota (Catholic Unity) Sokol Branch 46, to make into their exhibition grounds.¹⁸⁸ Before becoming the park, the first use of the lot was as a lumberyard for the J.H. Queal Co. At the end of 1917, the Thompson Lumber Co. of Minneapolis acquired ownership of all Queal yards including the one at Tabor.¹⁸⁹ After Thompson relocated the lumberyard and sold the lot to the Sokol in 1931, the yard's former office building was used for a

¹⁸¹ The builders were reported to be Anton Vancura, Frank J. Walloch, Anton Koupal, Joseph Kostal, and Jos. M. Soukup. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 February 1938—3 March 1938.

¹⁸² *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 57.

¹⁸³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 February 1950—13 April 1950.

¹⁸⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 19 October 1950—13 December 1951.

¹⁸⁵ *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 53; *B-Y's Lines Salutes Tabor Centennial*.

¹⁸⁶ Information from Dennis Povondra to the author.

¹⁸⁷ Dockendorf, "New Leadership."

¹⁸⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 12 February 1931.

¹⁸⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 December 1917.

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few years by a dentist, Dr. Fitzgerald, who came from Springfield twice a week, and then by Evelyn Blachnik's Kur-Lee Beauty Shoppe until she married and closed the shop in 1947.¹⁹⁰ In September 1936, Thompson Yards cancelled the remaining \$400 debt on the park as a donation to the Sokol.¹⁹¹

After they purchased the lot, the K.J.S. cleared some of the buildings and converted a lumber shed into a grandstand.¹⁹² In August 1933, they plowed the lot to sow new blue grass and repaired the grandstand that had been damaged in severe winds the month before.¹⁹³ In 1935, work before a big event included painting of the hall, fence, beauty shop, and grandstand by Joseph Schuch and Jos. Kostal; making repairs, laying seats for 600, and hanging electric lighting in the grandstand by Koupal and Vancura; and building six-foot fences on the east and south sides of the park.¹⁹⁴ From 1936 to 1937, work included leveling the grounds, adding two concrete bird baths, and planting trees, shrubs, and flowers. The men who did the work included James Kulish, Jos. Koupal, Laddie Kostel, J.J. Rezac, and James W. Schuch—the latter was appointed park caretaker in May 1938.¹⁹⁵

When the Sokol branch disbanded in 1972, it transferred park ownership to the Catholic Workman Branch 93. With Beseda Hall, the park went to the FCSLA (First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association) Life organization in 2004 and to Beseda Hall, Inc. in 2022.¹⁹⁶

The former lumber shed that had been the park's grandstand was severely damaged in a storm in December 2010, and it was removed from the site. In 2011, it was replaced with the current metal arched grandstand.¹⁹⁷

Recreation, Entertainment, and Czech Culture at Beseda Hall

Since its early years as a dance hall and then Opera House, Tabor has used this building for an immense number of meetings, lectures, movies, dances, musical performances, and dramatics. After being renamed Beseda Hall in 1930, similar events continued, in addition to more intensive use for meetings and meals by its new owners, the local Catholic societies.

In addition to those frequent activity types described in the sections below, there were some quite unique events held at the hall over the years. In the 1900s and 1910s, there were shows by vaudeville companies, temporary roller skating rinks, a strong man, a puppeteer, wrestling matches, a show by Hawaiian dancers, visiting church services and Sunday schools, sales

¹⁹⁰ Blachnik advertised having graduated from the Schuyler Beauty School in Sioux Falls. Anna Ptak and then Helen Rokusek ran the shop in 1941-1942. Later the shop building was moved to another part of town for use as a residence. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 9 April 1931—8 May 1947.

¹⁹¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 24 September 1936.

¹⁹² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 12 February 1931.

¹⁹³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 13 July 1933—3 August 1933.

¹⁹⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 July 1935—8 August 1935.

¹⁹⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 13 August 1936—21 July 1938.

¹⁹⁶ Dockendorf, "New Leadership."

¹⁹⁷ Information from Dennis Povondra to the author.

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exhibitions, the raffle of a horse, and also a few auction and land sales.¹⁹⁸ In the 1920s, there were a minstrel show by a troupe from Georgia, concerts by the Bohemian American Concert Co. of Omaha and by students from the Normal School at Springfield SD, a benefit show by and for Father Flanagan's charitable home for "homeless, abandoned and wayward boys" in Omaha, and a puppet and magic act called "The Man with the Wooden Family."¹⁹⁹ In the 1930s and 1940s, events included a Czech magician, Commercial Club prize giveaways, the 1932 town program for George Washington's Bicentennial, polls for the national wheat referendum, and the 1941 county 4-H Achievement Day.²⁰⁰

Dances, Bands, and Orchestras

From the earliest days, the hall was used for regular public and special dances with music by local and visiting bands or orchestras. Whole families attended the dances. The hall hosted some dances for public holidays such as New Year's Eve, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, and Thanksgiving, but more regularly for the Catholic holidays of St. Wenceslaus Day on September 28th, Katerina (St. Catherine's) Day on November 25th, Three Kings Day (Epiphany) on January 6th, and the commemoration of Bohemia's patron saint, St. John of Nepomuk, on May 16th.²⁰¹ Large crowds from around the area also attended Tabor's last dances before and first dances after the religious seasons of fasting at Advent and Lent, since no dances happened during them. The "last before Lent" dance was usually held over two days, with the second night scheduled from 8 p.m. to midnight on Shrove Tuesdays before Lent started on a Wednesday. A 1905 article noted that two-day pattern was an "old custom... retained by the old settlers who came to this country" from Bohemia.²⁰² The town was proud of its reputation for successful dances. Often, two or more halls held dances on the holidays. After St. John's Day in 1905, the local newspaper celebrated that all three of Tabor's dance halls were "packed with people from all directions" brought by train—which had added a coach for the traffic. The news item claimed that "Tabor has a far reaching reputation for being a town in which the very best entertainments and dances are frequently held."²⁰³ The three bands in the three halls "played none but the famous Bohemian pieces, which have an irresistible power upon the dancers; they are melodious, intensively rhythmical; and their cheerful theme brings one to mythical spheres, and the strains of their brisk tempo, bring life and energy into the limbs of the most sluggish."²⁰⁴ In 1906, St. John's Day celebrations in Tabor included church services, a baseball game, and "the rest of the day spent in dancing" at two halls, including with the Tabor Band at Welfl's Hall.²⁰⁵ Early St. Wenceslaus Day celebrations also often involved processions to mass, baseball games, foot races, community meals put on by local women, band concerts, and drama performances. In 1908, along with parade, baseball, and dances in all four halls in town, the program included a

¹⁹⁸ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 23 March 1905—17 October 1912; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 18 September 1916—18 September 1919.

¹⁹⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 9 March 1922—15 December 1927.

²⁰⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 February 1930—28 August 1941.

²⁰¹ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 24 November 1904—26 December 1912; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 8 May 1913—8 February 1951.

²⁰² *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 9 March 1905.

²⁰³ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 18 May 1905.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 17 May 1906.

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carnival with a merry-go-round, balloon ascension, and a “Slide for Life” thrill act where a man descended from the town’s water tank on a wire.²⁰⁶ Into the 1940s, Tabor still marked the day with a big procession to mass and an evening dance. In 1947, the advertisements noted it was “one of the big dances held each year in Tabor from early pioneer days and draws large crowds from near and far.”²⁰⁷



Tabor Independent (SD), November 20, 1930.

From 1905 to the present, many couples have held the receptions and/or dances for their weddings or anniversaries in the hall.²⁰⁸ For instance, in 1929, three couples had joint anniversary celebrations together in the Opera House with Ptak’s Orchestra playing for a dance and a “lunch was served at midnight.”²⁰⁹ In 1948, one announcement in the paper for a wedding dance on Easter Sunday advertised “Lots of good Czech music. Everybody welcome.”²¹⁰

Organizations and lodges like the Catholic Workman, Woodmen, Knights of Columbus, Knights of St Wenceslaus, the Z.C.B.J., and the American Legion post held public dances here, although there were also sometimes “invitation dances” just for members.²¹¹ There were also dances to raise funds for community groups like the local fire company, municipal band, and baseball

²⁰⁶ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 17 September 1908.

²⁰⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 23 September 1920—18 September 1947.

²⁰⁸ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 19 October 1905—1 February 1912; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 14 August 1919—6 December 1951; *Daily Republic* (Mitchell SD), 1 December 1965—8 June 1977; *Argus-Leader* (Sioux Falls SD), 7 May 1973; “Marriages,” Bon Homme County, accessed online, 13 May 2024, <http://www.bonhomme.sngenweb.com/marriage.htm>.

²⁰⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 7 February 1929.

²¹⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 25 March 1948.

²¹¹ The Z.C.B.J. had their own lodge building, but for at least a few occasions when they anticipated large attendance, they had the dances in the Opera House. *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 26 April 1906—29 August 1912; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 1 May 1913—23 May 1946.

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team, and, even on occasion, particular individuals or families in need.²¹² In 1923, a dance at the Opera House concluded a day's events marking the 4th annual reunion of Bon Homme County's military veterans.²¹³ Until they completed their own hall in 1947, the Legion used the Opera House/Beseda Hall for carnival dances "with stringers and lanterns in a riot of color and light" from 1922 to 1937, masquerades from 1925 to 1931, prize dances from 1933 to 1941, and stag parties in 1945 and 1946.²¹⁴

There were also a wide variety of less common or novelty dances. In the 1910s, cornhusker dances gave free tickets and/or prizes to those who brought the longest, thickest, and heaviest ear of corn with them.²¹⁵ Through the 1920s, masquerade dances were very popular, with prizes given for the best masks and companies from Sioux Falls or Sioux City bringing costumes to town to rent on the day.²¹⁶ In 1938-1940, Beseda Hall hosted Hard Time Dances with dancers encouraged to wear costumes of "your Old Grey Bonnet and your old tattered duds"—an effort to lighten spirits during the Depression.²¹⁷ In the mid-1940s, there were May dances and "first after Harvest" dances.²¹⁸

Musical accompaniment in the 1900-1910 period often featured local Tabor bands and the orchestra. Others included Johnson's orchestra, the 6-piece Isley's Orchestra, the Mikota Harp Orchestra from Yankton, the De Luca orchestra of Yankton, and the Dante Saxophone Band.²¹⁹ After the building was remodeled into the Opera House in 1918, dances got bigger with numerous accompanying bands and orchestras. Among those who appeared more frequently were the Tabor Band, Tabor Orchestra, Nikl's Orchestra, Jerry's orchestra, Isley's Orchestra, Tom Ptak's Orchestra, Mikota orchestra, Joseph (Joe) Fejfar's orchestra, Jimmie Barnett and his VSA band, and Duffy Belorad and his orchestra. Traveling bands became more popular in the 1930s and 1940s. There were orchestras (and sometimes jazz bands) from Wagner, Dante, Tyndall, Tripp, Yankton, Vermillion, Mitchell, Deadwood, as well as from Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and Kansas.²²⁰ The bands were usually comprised of six to nine men, although some had up to twenty musicians. In one strange news account of dynamite discovered hidden under the hall, the item noted that the visiting orchestra had stayed there overnight and slept on the hall floor, which may have been a common arrangement for touring bands.²²¹

Regularly through the 1940s, many of the traveling bands coming to Tabor advertised having Bohemian music in their repertoire or a piano-accordion accompaniment. A few of those were

²¹² *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 24 May 1906—14 October 1909; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 9 April 1914—13 April 1950.

²¹³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 23 August 1923.

²¹⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 2 November 1922—3 October 1946.

²¹⁵ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 5 November 1908—2 November 1911; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 23 October 1919.

²¹⁶ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 16 February 1905—3 February 1910; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 January 1919—9 January 1930.

²¹⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 February 1938—18 January 1940.

²¹⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 29 July 1943—1 August 1946.

²¹⁹ *Bon Homme County (Tabor) Independent* (Tabor SD), 5 January 1905—23 October 1919.

²²⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), September 26, 1918—11 November 1948.

²²¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 13 October 1921.

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the Uherka band of Tyndall, Leo Stekly's orchestra of Tyndall, Jos. S. Petrik and his Bohemian band, Melmer's orchestra, Jim Hovorka and his Omaha Radio and Dance Orchestra, the Royal Hi-Lander orchestra of Fremont NE, and the Legionnaires Orchestra of Dewitt NE.²²² Moeller's Accordion Band of Ames IA advertised "playing the best in Old Time and Modern Dance music, Bohemian, Scandinavian and American tunes."²²³ Occasionally, groups playing in Tabor advertised having Black performers, like the Dixieland Syncopators and the Omaha Nite Owls, or featuring women, like the Clara Skala All Girl Orchestra of Ravenna, NE, the "girls novelty orchestra" Danceland Serenaders, and Faye Speir and her WNAX Band.²²⁴

In the 1930s and 1940s, bands increasingly advertised their ties to area radio stations as either station bands or regulars, and some advertised bringing their own sound systems from companies like RKO or RCA. WNAX radio in Yankton was the closest station. They had their own Bohemian band that toured, and numerous bands played on WNAX as they traveled through.²²⁵ From WAAW in Omaha came Smetana's Orchestra and the Golden Prague Orchestra.²²⁶ In 1935, Smetana's Orchestra featured singer and accordionist Frank King, a Black man who sang also in German and Czech, which he had learned while growing up in those communities in Texas.²²⁷ There were also the Sinkule KGBZ orchestra from York, NE, the Frank Dolozal Bohemian Studio orchestra and J.F. Lukesh and his Bohemian Orchestra both from station KMMJ in Nebraska, and Ernest Kolman and his Bohemian Harmony Kings orchestra from KFBI in Abilene, KS.²²⁸

On occasion, the newspaper hinted at the issues that the popular public dances had also, including on matters of behavior and morality. In 1920, owners Matuska & Rokusek advertised "that anyone using profane or lewd language in the Opera House at any time or particularly during a dance, will be promptly kicked out and given over to the marshal and fined. Smart Alecks take notice. Also children under the age of 16 years will not be permitted to dances unless accompanied by parents."²²⁹ In 1921, a new state law required girls under age 18 be accompanied by a parent/guardian, though the *Independent* pointedly noted that boys under 18 should also have been included, saying "the double standard seems to stick even in this century."²³⁰ Over several years, notices of upcoming dances included the request to keep minor children off the dance floor or ensure they were accompanied by a parent.²³¹ In 1929, a Fourth of July dance sponsored by the Knights of St. Wenceslaus lodge specified that it would be "an old time dance and indecent dancing will be prohibited."²³² In 1930, new managers promised that their floor managers would "keep strict order" for the first dance after Lent, and in 1933, the

²²² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 8 February 1923—14 August 1947; Kucera, *Czech Music*, 112.

²²³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 1 May 1947.

²²⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 9 September 1926—26 May 1938.

²²⁵ In the 1930s, numerous local orchestras, the Tabor band, St. Wenceslaus Church's choir, and individual singers from Tabor were broadcast from WNAX also. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 9 May 1935—2 January 1936.

²²⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 21 August 1930—21 May 1936; Kucera, *Czech Music*, 100.

²²⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 20 June 1935—4 July 1935.

²²⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 26 April 1934—6 June 1940; Kucera, *Czech Music*, 102.

²²⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 11 November 1920.

²³⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 June 1921.

²³¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 25 January 1923—29 October 1931.

²³² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 July 1929.

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Independent's editor commented after a big dance that it was “too bad that many such occasion must be marred by some one making a fool of himself.”²³³ In 1938, a state law required anyone under 18 be accompanied by a parent or guardian for public dances, and they couldn't play in the orchestras for dances. State law also often prohibited dances and other amusements on Sundays (although this was sometimes ignored) or dances carrying into the early morning hours.²³⁴

Throughout their editorship of the *Tabor Independent*, the Dvoraks regularly reported on upcoming dances at Beseda Hall.²³⁵ In recent years, there have been New Year's Eve family night dances at the hall.

Dramatics and Vaudeville

As early as 1904 at least, local drama clubs and, later, the Sokol clubs had robust amateur theater programs that provided entertainment in Tabor. Early performances were often at Society Hall, but after the Opera House's 1918 remodeling to add a stage, it was a magnet for dramatic plays and ensemble shows in the vaudeville tradition.²³⁶ According to local news reports, most performances were generally well-attended, assuming there was sufficient advertising and road conditions were good. Many of the performances were Czech in both story and language. Local musicians or bands often played for the show or performed between acts. There were also shows traveled around by area colleges and by more professional companies from cities like Omaha and Chicago. For a period in 1927-1928, vaudeville-style acts were incorporated into big Sunday night line-ups that included the local orchestra's concert and movies.²³⁷ However, Tabor saw fewer national touring theater or vaudeville companies overall, compared to detailed studies of the opera houses in Dell Rapids and Brookings. In Tabor, the majority of performances were by local dramatic clubs or Czech touring performers.²³⁸

The hall was used for at least one play, given by the local Boy Scouts in January 1918, before the opera house conversion that spring.²³⁹ In 1920 and 1922, the local Camp Fire girls club gave entertainment programs in order to fundraise for camp—the first featured a Bohemian play with songs written for them by J.A. Dvorak.²⁴⁰ In 1921-1926, the local American Legion post hosted minstrel show performances, as well as a Bohemian concert performance by the Josef Konečný company of Chicago.²⁴¹ In April 1921, the local dramatics club performed a Bohemian play at the opera house to raise funds for a church organ, which they also traveled to perform in Dante

²³³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 24 April 1930, 21 September 1933.

²³⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 17 February 1921—8 July 1948.

²³⁵ Without access to the local newspaper reporting, documentation for dances in the 1960s-2000s is sparse in research materials.

²³⁶ Subsection for Tabor's Sokol lodge also follows below. *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 3 November 1904-6 January 1910.

²³⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 13 January 1927—5 January 1928.

²³⁸ Gerry A. Perrin, “A History of the Theatrical and Community Activities in the Early Dell Rapids, South Dakota, Opera House,” 1970, MA Thesis, Speech, and Theodore R. Switzer, “A History of Theatre and Theatrical Activities in Brookings, South Dakota from 1879 through 1898,” 1962, MS Thesis, Communication Studies and Theatre. South Dakota State University, Brookings.

²³⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), January 17, 1918, January 24, 1918.

²⁴⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 29 April 1920—11 May 1922.

²⁴¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 31 March 1921—17 June 1926.

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and Lesterville, and in Verdigre, NE. In turn, the Lesterville club presented “Comedy of Errors” at Tabor, also for the organ fund.²⁴² In the 1920s and 1930s, amateur dramatic clubs from area towns like Utica, Gregory, Wagner, Dante, Tyndall, Yankton, Niobrara, NE, Verdigre, NE, Howells, NE, and Sioux City, IA brought their shows to the Opera House / Beseda Hall.²⁴³ In the same period, Tyndall, Utica, and at least one rural school also held Czech summer schools that had practiced Bohemian plays and did performances in Tabor.²⁴⁴ Professional troupes performed Czech-language plays at the Opera House in the early 1920s, including the Bohemian-American National Theater (České Národní Divadlo) from Chicago.²⁴⁵ In 1925, that company returned for three nights of performances, including two “operettas based on national Bohemian and Slovaks life” and a “historic play” about the Roman period. The 14-member company traveled by car and brought their own scenery.²⁴⁶ Between 1919 and the late 1930s, the Catholic Sokol and later also the Sokol Tyrs organizations had drama clubs that regularly put on Czech plays at Beseda Hall (more details in Sokol Organizations section below).

In 1961 and 1962, a Tabor dramatic club toured the Czech plays *Dva vojaci od muziky* (Two Soldiers from a Band) and *Hospudka u Markyty* (An Inn at Markyta) in the Nebraska communities of Dwight, Abie, Verdigre, Wilber, and Omaha.²⁴⁷ After their organization in 1975, the Czech Heritage Preservation Society held several heritage variety programs with songs, readings, and skits in Czech. In 1976, the Society put on a variety program of Czech songs, readings, and dramatic skits at Beseda Hall, and the following year, they performed three one-act plays there for Czech Days in June.²⁴⁸ In the early 2000s, member Helen Vlasak wrote original Czech plays and pageants for the Society to perform, including “Dobry Den (Good Day),” “A Day in Barbara’s Bar,” “Lucky or Unlucky,” and “Skoda Lasky (Wasted Love).” For some plays, Vlasak also wrote new lyrics for familiar songs to use in the performances.²⁴⁹

Movies

Moving picture shows were advertised at the hall as early as December 1911, when the Barger Bros. of Bon Homme, SD, traveled their projection machine to area towns to show films; they intended to show at Tabor every two weeks.²⁵⁰ In 1915, John Matuska and Dale Hampton moved their movie equipment into Michel Hall from Society Hall, and they showed movies regularly.²⁵¹ After its conversion to an opera house, there were several grander “screen plays”

²⁴² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 7 April 1921—28 April 1921.

²⁴³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 14 April 1921—9 February 1939.

²⁴⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 21 August 1924—18 June 1936.

²⁴⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 1 September 1921—8 June 1922.

²⁴⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 30 April 1925—21 May 1925.

²⁴⁷ Kucera, *Czech Drama*, 33, 131.

²⁴⁸ *Aberdeen Daily News* (SD), 23 March 1976—17 June 1977; *Daily Republic* (Mitchell SD), 21 April 1977.

²⁴⁹ Clippings from Dennis Povondra, Czech Heritage Preservation Society Inc.; “Helen R. Vlasak, 1916-2014,” Obituaries, Bon Homme County, accessed online, 13 May 2024, <http://www.bonhomme.sdgenweb.com/obits013.htm>.

²⁵⁰ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 14 December 1911.

²⁵¹ Matuska and Hampton had bought their equipment from Sioux Falls in December 1914. John Cap bought out Hampton that November, and T. Koletzky bought out Cap in March 1916. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 17 December 1914—30 March 1916, 30 August 1951.

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that came to Tabor as special events. For instance, in 1918, these included the 11-reel play “Intolerance... a historical religious epic by D.W. Griffith” (that was also followed by a dance) and a 7-reel called “The Warrior... showing scenes from the struggle on the Italian front.”²⁵² In 1919-1921, the regular Sunday movie showings included “The Birth of a Nation,” “Tarzan of the Apes,” and “The Kid” with Charlie Chaplin and Jackie Coogan.²⁵³ Although sometimes paused when attendance fell off, Sunday movies and occasional bigger film events continued through the 1920s.²⁵⁴ At times, Tabor’s Junior orchestra played for the movie showings.²⁵⁵ In the late 1920s to 1931, there were special events held to show Czechoslovakian movies (usually brought by promoters from Chicago), and there were films hosted by the local American Legion post and the Modern Woodmen as promotions or fundraisers.²⁵⁶ In June 1930, B.G. Rantz of Wells, MN came and took film of local people, which he showed at Beseda Hall.²⁵⁷ In 1930 and 1931, local businesses sponsored free movies shown at the hall on Christmas Eve before midnight mass; there were also a visit by Santa and gifts for the children.²⁵⁸

News reports about movies at Beseda Hall fell off in 1931 when “talkies” started to be shown in theaters nearby in Scotland and Yankton.²⁵⁹ The first talking picture advertised in Tabor was a free event held in Beseda Hall on April 21, 1937. The local manager of Thompson Yards, Jon Hatwan arranged the event for the Keystone Steel & Wire Co. of Peoria, IL. Shown were a feature drama “Hidden Treasures,” a promotional film of a steel mill, a radio star program called “Hoosier Hot Shots,” and an animated cartoon. It was reported that “the reproduction of sound was very good despite the fact that the hall is not sound proofed.”²⁶⁰ In 1937-1941, companies like Standard Oil, Goodyear Tire, McCormick-Deering Corp., and the Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Co. sponsored similar promotional film events, occasionally shown open-air in Sokol Park.²⁶¹ In February 1938, the hall purchased and installed an amplifier and loudspeaker from Omaha to use both for dances and movies. Although initially the sound still “was not so good” because of acoustics in the hall, the first movie with that system was a film from Czechoslovakia called “Mother is Your Treasure.” They also showed at least five other Czech films in 1938.²⁶² In May 1941, the town’s commercial club decided to sponsor Wednesday evening outdoor movies (American/English) in Sokol Park, which they moved into Beseda Hall for the winter.²⁶³ Movies were rarely new releases, but features were popular Hollywood films with stars like Tex Ritter, Rita Hayworth, or Laurel and Hardy. Throughout WWII, war reels and news typically accompanied the feature. Occasionally, there were local films like footage of the James River flood in 1942 and footage of the 1942 renaming ceremonies for Lidice Street in

²⁵² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 June 1918—9 January 1919.

²⁵³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 20 March 1919—20 October 1921.

²⁵⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 21 September 1922—28 March 1929.

²⁵⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 3 February 1927—28 November 1929.

²⁵⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 22 April 1926—22 October 1931.

²⁵⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 26 June 1930.

²⁵⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 18 December 1930—31 December 1931.

²⁵⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 8 October 1931—21 January 1932.

²⁶⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 15 April 1937—22 April 1937.

²⁶¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 7 October 1937—13 March 1941.

²⁶² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 February 1938—22 September 1938.

²⁶³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 22 May 1941—25 December 1941.

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Tabor that was shown in 1946.²⁶⁴ Wednesday evening movies continued in the hall until the men running the shows, Merle J. Burns and Frank M. Medeck, bought a new machine in the spring of 1946 that was incompatible with the town's direct current (DC) form of electric power.²⁶⁵

In June 1948, William Fejfar bought "a movie outfit" and started showing movies in Beseda Hall on Saturdays. Most were popular movies, but he also showed Czech films occasionally. Fejfar simultaneously worked to remodel another building downtown into a movie theater with better sound and picture quality as well as padded seats; it opened that November and supplanted Beseda Hall as the movie venue for Tabor.²⁶⁶

School Events

Beseda Hall was regularly used by the local public and Catholic schools as an auditorium. Until the 1970s, the schools held plays, music recitals, holiday programs, 8th grade graduations for both the Catholic and the public schools, public high school commencement ceremonies (starting with the first in 1927), fundraising entertainments (like student shows, carnivals, basket socials, sales, dances, and films), a few school district meetings, public meetings on school issues, and other speakers on education topics.²⁶⁷ Held from 1926 to 1951, the student-organized school carnivals were big events, often fundraising for athletic and arts activities. The carnivals included plays and skits, game booths, candy stands, glee club and band performances, prizes, royalty coronations, and sometimes a public dance afterwards.²⁶⁸ As was widely popular at the time, many of the skits in the 1930s and 1940s were blackface or minstrel acts.²⁶⁹

Basketball teams—boys and girls school and town teams—started playing in Tabor in the mid-1920s, initially in Society Hall.²⁷⁰ In October 1927, the boys and girls high school basketball teams arranged to rent the Opera House for their practices and games.²⁷¹ The boys set up baskets, bankboards, screens or guards for the windows and lights, and painted lines for the court at the start of each season.²⁷² In 1940, new backboards without a standing post support were installed, eliminating posts that "were responsible for players being hurt during the games."²⁷³ In 1939, Tabor had a Merchants team, who also used Beseda hall for games. The Tabor Merchants had games against Scotland and Wagner's town teams, Yankton College, and travelling teams from Sioux City, IA and from the Rosebud / Sicangu Lakota Reservation.²⁷⁴ In 1946, there was a Tabor independent team as well as the high school team.²⁷⁵ In 1950, the Tabor high school

²⁶⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 11 June 1942—19 September 1946.

²⁶⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 8 January 1942—11 April 1946.

²⁶⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 June 1948—10 May 1951.

²⁶⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 25 March 1915—13 December 1951; Tabor High School yearbook, *Cardinal* (1961), 11, 28.

²⁶⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 18 October 1934—7 November 1935.

²⁶⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 19 November 1931—18 November 1948.

²⁷⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 3 January 1924—24 February 1927.

²⁷¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 13 October 1927.

²⁷² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 November 1932—16 November 1933.

²⁷³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 7 November 1940—14 November 1940.

²⁷⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 19 January 1939—28 December 1939.

²⁷⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 26 December 1946.

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team's place in the Little Missouri Conference was under threat because their facilities lacked showers and heating, as well as because of issues in the team's performance. To address this, Tabor's school board decided to build a new gymnasium and playfield by the school, which was finished in time for an invitational tournament in December 1951.²⁷⁶

Other Meetings and Community Events

In small towns, opera houses and halls like this one were used for a wide variety of speeches and meetings. There were not a high number of political events at the Opera House / Beseda Hall apart from the Czech-related speakers around 1918 and 1938 (discussed in sections on WWI and WWII below). Yet, a few other political speakers who appeared included R.O. Richards of Huron, Chas. B. Fousek of Chamberlain, Rep. Charles H. Dillon of Yankton, and Non-Partisan League organizers J.L. White and Emil Sudan.²⁷⁷ In 1934-1940, several Democratic campaign rallies with dances afterwards, as well as at least one Republican rally, were held at Beseda Hall.²⁷⁸

In 1918-1921, local residents tried holding Chautauqua or Lyceum series at the Opera House with visiting musicians, singers, and lecturers, though public enthusiasm and financial returns for those events was reportedly low.²⁷⁹ In the late 1910s-20s, there were lecture and film events for farmers put on by industry companies (like International Harvester in 1920) or federal agencies (like the Bureau of Animal Husbandry).²⁸⁰ Local farmers' associations held meetings in the Opera House in 1920 and 1921 also.²⁸¹ Women's Extension Clubs occasionally held meetings, demonstrations, at least one banquet, and a fundraiser talent program between 1926 and 1948, with regular meetings at Beseda Hall for a time in 1932-1934.²⁸² Other large meetings at the opera house included citizens' caucuses before town elections in 1918 and 1919, as well as annual meetings of the local Bohemian Farmers Mutual Fire Insurance Company, Tabor's American Legion post in 1920 and 1921, and the Bon Homme-Yankton Electric Association starting in 1949.²⁸³

The Opera House/Beseda Hall was the largest venue in town and used for many mass public meetings on important issues of the day. When the Tabor State Bank failed in 1924 during the agricultural recession, a meeting was subsequently held in the Opera House for depositors to discuss options for reorganizing and reopening the bank.²⁸⁴ When the bank closed again in the Great Depression, stockholders and depositors met in Beseda Hall in June 1932 "pertaining to

²⁷⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 1 June 1950—13 December 1951.

²⁷⁷ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 15 February 1912—24 October 1912; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 19 October 1916—12 February 1920.

²⁷⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 October 1934—24 October 1940.

²⁷⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 11 July 1918—24 February 1921.

²⁸⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 11 January 1917—8 February 1923; Gregory A. Waller, *Beyond the Movie Theater: Sites, Sponsors, Uses, Audiences* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023), 155.

²⁸¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 15 January 1920—2 June 1921.

²⁸² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 25 March 1926—29 April 1948.

²⁸³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 April 1918—20 September 1951.

²⁸⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 22 October 1925—29 October 1925.

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the liquidation of the bank.”²⁸⁵ During the Great Depression, mass meetings were held in Beseda Hall about organizing a town National Relief Administration committee, about grasshopper control methods with the county Extension agent, and about organizing farmers advocacy work during a Farm Bureau meeting.²⁸⁶ In 1945-1946, the Commercial Club hosted public meetings there about the city water supply and converting city electrical power to alternating current—although ultimately the city put its power needs in the hands of the Bon Homme-Yankton Electric Association.²⁸⁷ In 1950, the Electric Association had a public event at Beseda Hall with lectures, discussions, and displays of appliances, equipment, and wiring supplies.²⁸⁸ In 1951, Forrest Francisco of Northwestern Bell Telephone Co. at Omaha appeared for a lecture and demonstration on the new uses of microwave technology for television and telephone service.²⁸⁹

In the late 1920s to the 1950s, Tabor’s fire company, baseball teams, the American Legion and Auxiliary posts, the Tabor Commercial Club, St. Wenceslaus parish, the Knights of Columbus chapter, and the Knights of St. Wenceslaus all held meetings in Beseda Hall, some with a meal and/or “smoker” social event afterwards. The municipal band used the hall for banquets, meetings, and rehearsals, and from 1935 to 1945 held most of their Saturday evening outdoor summer concerts at the grandstand in Sokol Park.²⁹⁰ On occasion, individual families held reunions and funeral receptions or rosary services at the hall.²⁹¹

In August 1920, Tabor held a huge two-day golden jubilee to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Czech immigrants arriving in Dakota Territory. The jubilee emphasized Czech cultural heritage by encouraging people to make and wear “old Bohemian costumes” for the parade, arranging for Ludvik’s Theater Company of Chicago to perform (and provide an allegorical parade float), and having gymnastic exercises by the local Sokol lodge. At the Opera House were held musical performances, the Ludvik Co. plays, public dances, and speeches by local “old settlers,” Rev. Bouska, Rev. B. Marek (Presbyterian minister), and Governor Peter Norbeck. Additionally, at other venues, the town celebrations included baseball games, horse races, Catholic mass, and meals. J.A. Dvorak also published a memorial history book (in Czech) on the Czechs in South Dakota in time for the jubilee.²⁹²

From 1936 to 1947, the Z.C.B.J. rented Beseda Hall for larger district meetings as well as for the Tabor lodge’s 40th and 50th anniversary celebrations, which included speeches, meals, dances, plays, and other entertainments.²⁹³ In May 1944, the Legion Auxiliary and the local Harmony

²⁸⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 June 1932.

²⁸⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 21 September 1933—14 March 1935.

²⁸⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 13 December 1945—26 December 1946.

²⁸⁸ This was also the time that electrical lines were being constructed through the area, using power from the new Fort Randall Dam on the Missouri River, and farmers were encouraged to join and wire their farms for connection to the line. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 31 August 1950—14 September 1950.

²⁸⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 29 March 1951.

²⁹⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 December 1923—23 August 1945.

²⁹¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 29 March 1951—7 June 1951; *Argus-Leader* (Sioux Falls SD), 26 February 1990.

²⁹² The Ludvik theater company was well known and had come to Chicago from Bohemia in 1893. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 5 August 1920—2 September 1920; Chada, *The Czechs*, 156-157; Kucera, *Czech Drama*, 129-131.

²⁹³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 31 December 1936—31 October 1940.

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Club (a women's Extension club) hosted a community music festival in the hall for "National and Inter-American Music Week," which planned to have American music "intermingled with the best of the traditional Bohemian melodies and dances."²⁹⁴ In 1949, the local International Harvester dealer A.G. Honner arranged to hold a Family Party customer appreciation promotion at Beseda Hall with entertainments and films.²⁹⁵ In 1949 and 1950, the town board arranged for a community ice skating rink to be set up in Sokol Park, with leveling of the grounds done by John W. Kudrna.²⁹⁶ In 1968, the Kortan-Hatwan post of the American Legion gave a memorial observance at Beseda Hall for the 50th anniversary of the end of World War I to honor local veterans and the post's charter members.²⁹⁷

Over recent years, Beseda Hall has hosted weekly burger feeds, cornhole (bean bag toss) tournaments, as well as being available for rent for wedding receptions and other private events. In 2022, Tabor held its 150th town anniversary. Along with events at the church, cemetery, heritage park, and other downtown buildings, the main afternoon event was held at Beseda Hall, with a concert by the 1890 Band and a celebration program of speeches, recognitions, beseda dances, and a re-enactment of the town site purchase, all followed by a meal and, in the evening, a dance with band Angie Kriz and the Polkatoons.²⁹⁸

Czechoslovak Independence and World War I

Like Czech communities across the U.S. in the mid-1910s, Tabor residents were deeply concerned about the war in Europe and actively sought ways to support their home country, especially at the prospect of Czech and Slovak independence from Austria. They also worked in support of the American war effort.

From 1917 to 1919, many speaker events and fundraisers for Czech independence happened in Tabor, and the Opera House was a venue for several important ones. In April 1917, the local branch of the Bohemian National Alliance held a program featuring key speaker Dr. F.A. Sedláček of Omaha.²⁹⁹ In May, a leading organizer from the Alliance, Vojta Beneš, appeared at the hall to speak "on conditions in Bohemia during the first year of the war, and on the independence of Bohemia."³⁰⁰ In June 1918, a bazaar "for the benefit of the Bohemian Army, organized in France to fight Germany and Austria" were held at the Opera House. The event included bands, a musical program, a dance, a dinner, auctions of the donated goods, and projected photographs of the Czechoslovak army. Sedláček and Beneš returned as two of the

²⁹⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 27 April 1944—11 May 1944.

²⁹⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 November 1949—1 Decembr 1949.

²⁹⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 24 November 1949—30 November 1950.

²⁹⁷ *Daily Republic* (Mitchell SD), 26 November 1968.

²⁹⁸ "Tabor, South Dakota's 150th Anniversary Schedule of Events," Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International, accessed online, 10 May 2024, <https://cgsi.org/events/tabor-south-dakotas-150th-anniversary-festival>.

²⁹⁹ Sedláček had previously lived in Tyndall in 1897-1908. The Bohemian National Alliance was established in 1914 or 1915. It supported Czech independence from Austria and the British and American war efforts. It joined with its Catholic counterpart in 1917. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 5 April 1917; Capek, *The Čechs*, 266-267; Rosicky, *A History*; Garver, "Czech-American Freethinkers," 162.

³⁰⁰ Beneš also had a cousin James Benesh who had settled near Tyndall. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 May 1917; *Evening Huronite* (Huron SD), 9 September 1938.

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day's speakers. The paper reported that the bazaar raised an estimated \$10,000 and that three local men had signed up for the Czechoslovak army.³⁰¹ Looking back at the event a couple years later, editor Dvorak wrote: "The days of the bazaar were the most glorious and impressive moments which the writer has experienced during his 27 year stay in Tabor. People came from all directions and enthusiasm was displayed in everyone's eyes."³⁰²

For the Fourth of July in 1918, Tabor held a large holiday observance with a program at the Opera House. The Czech-language section of the newspaper reminded readers that demonstrations of American patriotism were encouraged by the Bohemian National Alliance and the National Alliance of Czech Catholics to provide public reassurance of their loyalty to the U.S. and garner American support for the cause of Czechoslovak independence, and that it was important for Tabor's reputation that the holiday celebrations be big and well-attended.³⁰³ That summer, the Alliance had also run its own Liberty Loan campaign for the U.S. war effort, reporting that over \$80,000 came in from South Dakota.³⁰⁴ In August 1918, the Ludvik Theater Company came from Chicago to perform four consecutive nights at the opera house, and advertised that a quarter of the ticket proceeds would go to the Czechoslovak army. That tour also included speeches recruiting men for that army.³⁰⁵

In Tabor, women formed a group of the Bohemian National Alliance's auxiliary, the "Včelky" (or Včelek, meaning "the Bees"), to raise funds and knit clothing for the Czechoslovak army in Siberia. Dvorak's 1920 history took special note of the efforts of Mrs. Bejsovec and Mrs. Mikolasek. The Tabor Včelky had raised money after the Fourth of July program, and they held fundraising meals at the opera house for St. Wenceslaus Day in September.³⁰⁶

After the Czechoslovak Republic declared independence in October 1918, Tabor community groups held a celebratory procession to the Opera House for a program with musical performances as well as a speech by Lieutenant M. Niederle of the Czechoslovak army in France, followed by the 5-reel film "Mothers of Liberty" that evening.³⁰⁷ In July 1919, Emma Novak for the Red Cross in Prague and Lt. Sedley Peck of the U.S. Army came to the Opera House during their national tour speaking about the impoverished postwar conditions in Czechoslovakia and the need for funding relief efforts.³⁰⁸

In those same years, Tabor used the hall for a notable number of events related to WWI generally. In June 1917, the town held a "patriotic demonstration" in honor of the seventy-three local men who registered for the draft that day. The day included Boy Scout drills, bands,

³⁰¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 30 May 1918—29 August 1918; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 46-47, 142.

³⁰² Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 142.

³⁰³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 27 June 1918—11 July 1918; Chada, *The Czechs*, 50-60.

³⁰⁴ *Bohemian Review* 2(6) (June 1918), 89; Capek, *The Čechs*, 267; Kubicek, "The Czechs," 121.

³⁰⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 8 August 1918—26 September 1918.

³⁰⁶ Tabor also had a local Red Cross doing similar work for the U.S. war effort. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 26 September 1918—3 October 1918; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 143; Křižan, *Souvenir*, 19.

³⁰⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 October 1918; Capek, *The Čechs*, 277.

³⁰⁸ Peck was part of Hoover's relief mission work in Serbia, Albania, Greece, and Bohemia. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 24 July 1919.

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speakers in both Czech and English, and a dance.³⁰⁹ That year there were also farewell dances given before men left for military service and fundraiser dances for the Red Cross, Home Guard, and Y.M.C.A.³¹⁰ Visiting speakers for the Red Cross and the National Council of Defense came through Tabor and spoke at the Opera House.³¹¹ In September 1918, the Opera House showed the propaganda silent film “Kaiser, The Beast of Berlin... (which) proves why Germany must be defeated.”³¹² In November, seven local organizations held a large “United War Work Campaign Rally” at the Opera House with speakers J.A. Dvorak in English and Rev. Bouska in Czech.³¹³ When the Armistice was announced ending the war, a 10 a.m. call went out to those who had phones and a parade began at 2 p.m. with groups marching from the Z.C.B.J. and Society halls to the Opera House for speeches.³¹⁴ After the war, three different speakers with experience on the war front came to the Opera House in 1918-1919 to raise funds for the ongoing work of the Red Cross and for Liberty Loan drives.³¹⁵ In 1919-1921, various films shown at the Opera House looked back at footage from the war and Czechoslovak independence, and at least one of those aimed to raise relief aid funds.³¹⁶

Czechoslovak Relief and World War II

In the autumn of 1938, English and French negotiations with Nazi Germany gave the Sudeten area of the Czechoslovak Republic to German control. In the wake of that, President Edvard Beneš resigned and came to the U.S. with his brother Vojta Beneš, who had been in the Czechoslovak legislature and a leader in education since 1918. Vojta Beneš made his third trip to Tabor in November 1938, speaking at Beseda Hall to bring awareness of the current situation and raise funds for the Red Cross to help Sudeten exiles and refugees. He also spoke in Verdigre, NE and in Yankton, where he did an interview on WNAX radio.³¹⁷

On March 12, 1939, Anton Jandáček, a newspaper editor from Prague, came to Tabor during a lecture tour sponsored by the National Alliance of Czech Catholics. He spoke about the refugee crisis and how they felt betrayed by the leaders of England and France. During his visit, he attended mass and visited the Catholic school in Tabor, but his stay was cut short when news arrived that Slovaks had invited Nazi Germany to control their country. Jandáček, whose family was still in Czechoslovakia, left immediately for Omaha, although he could not get back to Europe until August. In July, he returned to Tabor to speak during the Rev. Bouska’s 50th

³⁰⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 7 June 1917.

³¹⁰ Similar events happened in Czech communities in Nebraska also. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 21 June 1917—15 August 1918; Kubicek, “The Czechs,” 128.

³¹¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 April 1918—25 April 1918.

³¹² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 5 September 1918.

³¹³ Rev. Bouska was frequently a speaker for event programs and typically spoke in Czech. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 14 November 1918.

³¹⁴ Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 144.

³¹⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 5 December 1918—24 April 1919.

³¹⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 1 May 1919—15 September 1921.

³¹⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 3 November 1938—10 November 1938.

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anniversary ordination celebration. He “[urged] the Czechoslovaks of this country to continue in their efforts in freeing the unfortunate republic from the heel of German usurpers and looters.”³¹⁸

In April 1940, the Catholic lodges in Tabor put on a play in Beseda Hall to raise funds for the National Alliance of Czech Catholics; they sent \$138.10.³¹⁹ That August, Dr. Oldrich Chyle, a politician who had fled Czechoslovakia the year before, stopped in Tabor during a tour for the Z.C.B.J., raising money for both the Czech American National Alliance and the National Alliance of Czech Catholics. He spoke in both Czech and English about the aims and impact of Nazi and Gestapo attacks. Rev. Bouska and J.A. Dvorak also gave remarks for the event.³²⁰

In June 1942, news broke around the world that the Nazis had destroyed the town of Lidice near Prague. The men of Lidice were killed, the women sent to concentration camps, the children sent to Germany for re-education, and the buildings leveled. It was one of the Nazis’ acts of retaliation following the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi official who oversaw the protectorate of Czechoslovakia.³²¹ Several places around the world that summer took on the name Lidice in remembrance. In July, Tabor residents proposed renaming their main street as Lidice Street “as a constant reminder of Nazi inhumanity and brutality, a denunciation of the criminal destruction of the village of Lidice,” and the town board passed an ordinance to that effect.³²² In August, the naming event was marked with a parade, a program of speeches and songs, a Catholic mass in Sokol Park, beseda dances, a Sokol exhibition, a meal in Beseda Hall, a baseball game in Lincoln Park, and an evening dance. Planners encouraged people to wear national Czech clothing on the day. One of the parade’s allegorical floats displayed “a grave with a high cross, all in black and in mourning—Czechoslovakia mourning its loss of liberty.” Proceeds from food, tickets, and donations were used to buy over \$600 in war bonds.³²³

As local men went into military service, several gave their lives. Beseda Hall was used for part of at least two of their funeral events. In December 1944, the funeral cortege for Cpl. Lawrence Dugovic formed at Beseda Hall for procession to the church. In April 1945, the Legion Auxiliary served a meal at the hall for the family of Pvt. Ernest L. Hladik after his funeral. Also in April 1945, a large crowd gathered in Beseda Hall for the Legion post’s memorial service held for President Franklin Roosevelt after his death.³²⁴

Throughout the war, there were also a few mass meetings in Beseda Hall including one on federal farm, labor, and food-growing programs and one on recruiting women for war work.³²⁵ Towards the end of the war, national groups promoted used clothing drives for war-torn Europe, and the Altar and Rosary Society did a collection at Beseda Hall in April 1945.³²⁶ In October

³¹⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 2 March 1939—3 August 1939.

³¹⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 28 March 1940—18 April 1940.

³²⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 29 August 1940—5 September 1940.

³²¹ Along with other killings and deportations, the smaller Czech village of Ležáky was also destroyed. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 11 June 1942—6 August 1942.

³²² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 23 July 1942—30 July 1942.

³²³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 30 July 1942—24 September 1942.

³²⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 14 December 1944—19 April 1945.

³²⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 5 March 1942—25 February 1943.

³²⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 19 April 1945—7 February 1946.

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1947 at Beseda Hall, the South Dakota World Relief committee toured a film called “Seeds of Destiny” about conditions in Europe to inspire and organize additional relief collections.³²⁷ In 1948, both Rev. Ernest Ziska from Illinois and Anton Jandáček returned to Tabor to speak on relief efforts as well as their observations/experience of the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia that had happened in February.³²⁸

Catholic Organizations and Parish Events

Although typically using their church building, the St. Wenceslaus parish used Beseda Hall for a few large events. They held parish meetings in the hall in at least 1946 and 1951.³²⁹ In 1929, their St. Wenceslaus Day celebration marked the 1000th anniversary of the saint’s death as well as the “ruby jubilee” of Rev. Bouska’s ordination. At the Opera House were held the main programs, band concert, one of the town’s Saturday night dances, and the Sunday evening Czech play by the Sokol club.³³⁰ In 1939, for Bouska’s “golden” 50th anniversary of ordination, a similarly large community celebration was held with procession, mass, meals, speeches, play, band concert, and dance.³³¹ In 1942, they had a program and supper in Beseda Hall for Rev. Koman’s 15th anniversary of ordination.³³² In 1943, the parish held an ordination banquet for Rev. Father Mark Horacek, who had grown up in Tabor.³³³ In 1946, the St. Wenceslaus parish’s 75th anniversary jubilee featured a program in Sokol Park and a public dinner in Beseda Hall, as well as a procession to mass and afternoon baseball games in Lincoln Park.³³⁴

In 1891 in Minnesota, the Katolický Dělník / Catholic Workman fraternal order first formed for the mutual financial support in times of need, to maintain religious practice, and “to promote the moral, social and intellectual culture of its members.”³³⁵ In July 1905, Rev. Bouska led the formation of the Catholic Workman Branch 93 in Tabor, with eighteen young men as the first members.³³⁶ Bouska also was active in the national organization, and another man from Tabor, V.M. Horacek, became an organizer who traveled widely to start new lodges.³³⁷ The Tabor lodge initially held its regular meetings in their Society Hall, but special dances were held in the larger venues, including the Opera House.³³⁸ They also covered funeral expenses of their members.³³⁹ In 1920, they reported a membership of forty-three men.³⁴⁰ After the group bought Beseda Hall in 1930 with the Catholic Sokol branch, they formed a board of directors for the hall

³²⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 23 October 1947—30 October 1947.

³²⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 22 April 1948—21 October 1948.

³²⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 31 January 1946—25 January 1951.

³³⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 19 September 1929—3 October 1929.

³³¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 13 July 1939.

³³² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 11 June 1942.

³³³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 20 May 1943—27 May 1943.

³³⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 5 September 1946—3 October 1946.

³³⁵ Elznic, “Bohemians.” 74; Kubicek, “The Czechs,” 87.

³³⁶ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 13 July 1905—28 September 1905.

³³⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 24 May 1923—1 June 1939, 29 March 1951; *Le Sueur News-Herald* (MN), 30 May 1934; *Plattsmouth Journal* (NE), 24 February 1941.

³³⁸ *Bon Homme County Independent* (Tabor SD), 26 April 1906—14 February 1907; *Tabor Independent* (SD), 25 January 1917—20 January 1927.

³³⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), August 23, 1917—December 23, 1920.

³⁴⁰ Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 137.

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and appointed managers and janitors. The Catholic Workman then held their regular monthly and annual meetings in Beseda Hall, as well as big initiation events in 1937 and 1944, annual public dances, member Christmas parties, and a state convention in 1942.³⁴¹ In 1950 and 1951, they prepared and performed Czech operettas that proved popular, to raise funds for work on the hall. Accompanists were Albina Rezac on piano and Joe Jarolim on violin; the Tabor band played between acts; and, for 1951, L.A. Cimpl was noted as director.³⁴² Women typically prepared and served any lunches or banquets.³⁴³ The Catholic Workman branch disbanded in 2004, being succeeded by the First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association.³⁴⁴

In 1934 to 1943, the women's altar societies of St. Wenceslaus parish held popular evening card parties in Beseda Hall, for which they set up tables for pinochle, euchre, bridge, or bunco, and they typically served a lunch for a quarter. Some card parties featured a musical entertainment too, and some were fundraisers for work on the church.³⁴⁵ By 1942, they had begun using Beseda Hall regularly for meetings that were sometimes held concurrently with the Catholic Workman. A committee from the women usually served the meal that followed the meetings.³⁴⁶ In the 1940s at Beseda Hall, the Altar and Rosary Society occasionally held "pantry showers" for the Sisters who staffed the Catholic school, Mother's Day programs, and held a weekly public bake sale on most Wednesday nights from the spring of 1942 through at least 1950. Until the new movie theater opened, these correlated with nights that movies were shown in Beseda Hall. A notice in 1942 mentioned that they sold doughnuts, and one in 1950 specified offerings as kolache, bread, rolls, cakes, and pies.³⁴⁷ On a handful of occasions, the Legion Auxiliary or the Jolly Homemakers 4-H Club put on the Wednesday bake sale instead.³⁴⁸ From 1936 to at least 1951, the Catholic lodges held parish bazaars in Beseda Hall to raise funds for the church.³⁴⁹ The 1936 bazaar included an auction of livestock, poultry, and implements in Sokol park; public dances in the hall; the women's society preparing and serving meals at the hall; mass; a fancy work sale; an entertainment program; and music by the Tabor Concert band.³⁵⁰ Eventually the women's suppers became a prime draw, with menus that included fried chicken, as well as sometimes duck and/or goose, with sides, coffee, and dessert. The poultry was all donated, and attendance for the meal reached up to 1,300 people. In 1944, proceeds were reported over \$2,700.³⁵¹

The First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association (FCSLA), Inc., a fraternal life insurance company, succeeded the Catholic Workman in 2004. Tabor's branch retained the number 93. FCSLA continued management of Beseda Hall until 2022. Their events held at Beseda Hall included

³⁴¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 May 1937—14 June 1951.

³⁴² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 30 March 1950—19 April 1951

³⁴³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 24 October 1935—25 September 1941.

³⁴⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 8 May 1930—12 December 1935.

³⁴⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 15 February 1934—4 February 1943.

³⁴⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 12 March 1942—17 August 1944.

³⁴⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 November 1944—30 November 1950.

³⁴⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 22 June 1944—27 July 1950.

³⁴⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 5 November 1936—25 October 1951.

³⁵⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 26 November 1936.

³⁵¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 31 October 1940—18 October 1951.

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their regular meetings, some district and state meetings, potlucks, bingo fundraisers, holiday parties, New Year's Eve Family Fun Nights with dances, and Sokol Park picnics.³⁵²

Katolicka Jednota ("Catholic Unity") Sokol (K.J.S.)

With the support of Rev. Bouska, the Katolicka Jednota Sokol (K.J.S.) Branch 46 in Tabor organized on October 31, 1915 with thirty members, Robert Vauk as president, and M.J. Rada as secretary.³⁵³ They set up a gymnasium with "parallel and horizontal bars" in Society Hall, and an instructor from Omaha, Vaclav Vlček, came to get the lodge started and returned regularly to train the club.³⁵⁴ Initially, membership was for "any young man who is a practical Catholic and is over sixteen years of age," though they anticipated adding "practice nights for younger boys."³⁵⁵ It also opened to women the following month.³⁵⁶

Vlček helped them with their first exhibition of drills and exercises held at Society Hall later in February. The event included group photographs of the lodge members, a speech by Rev. Bouska on the history of the Sokol movement, and a public dance.³⁵⁷ For the Fourth of July in 1916, they hosted a Sokol meet in Tabor, inviting teams from Omaha. They made it a large community celebration with speeches, music, games, and a dance.³⁵⁸ From 1916 to 1937, the Tabor team also attended tournaments and meets in many Nebraska towns, as well as in Wisconsin and Texas.³⁵⁹ Tabor members also attended training courses at Chicago, Omaha, and Clarkson, NE.³⁶⁰

In 1920, the K.J.S. lodge rented the Opera House for their gymnastic drills, moving their equipment and apparatus there from the Society Hall building.³⁶¹ Into the 1930s, usually in the summer, the Sokol's biggest events were either a public exhibition that featured the Tabor team or a large "slet" (meet) that included invited teams from around the region.³⁶² The slets, usually two or three days long, featured drills and contests in the ball park, mass at St. Wenceslaus church, meals prepared and served by women (eventually in Beseda Hall), band concerts, baseball games, programs with speeches and songs, plays, and dances in the Opera House / Beseda Hall. These big events had to be supported by the town, with visitors lodging in homes

³⁵² First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association, *Fraternally Yours* 99(6) (March 2013), 22, 102(11) (August 2016), 10, 106(7) (April 2020), 15, and 108(10) (July 2022), 22; Dockendorf, "New Leadership."

³⁵³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 November 1915; 13 July 1939; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 137-138; Karolevitz, *With Faith*, 126.

³⁵⁴ Vaclav was sometimes Anglicized as Joseph or James. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 20 January 1916; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 138; Rosicky, *A History*, 362.

³⁵⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 20 January 1916.

³⁵⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 3 February 1916.

³⁵⁷ The photograph included Vlček as well as rows of sixteen men, thirteen women, and nineteen boys in their uniforms. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 17 February 1916—24 February 1916; Collections of the Czech Heritage Preservation Society, Inc., Tabor.

³⁵⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 8 June 1916—6 July 1916.

³⁵⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 18 May 1916—16 September 1937; *Omaha Daily Bee* (NE), 9 September 1917; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 138.

³⁶⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 14 September 1922—12 December 1935.

³⁶¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 June 1920.

³⁶² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 August 1921—1 August 1935.

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and donations of food that women prepared for the big meals. In September 1921, Tabor hosted a meet of the Catholic Sokol's Velehrad Circuit, with seven towns in Nebraska sending their teams. The newspaper reported that "the grounds were literally encircled by automobiles, several hundred in number, and the show in the evening filled the large Opera House to its capacity."³⁶³ In 1922, instructors Joseph Petrik and Vaclav Vlček led the Tabor Sokol's exhibition in drills by younger boys with wooden dumbbells, by the girls with rings, by young ladies with roses, calisthenics by men and boys, and horizontal and parallel bar drills by men. Eight men reportedly made a pyramid on the parallel bars that was "a thriller and executed with grace."³⁶⁴ For the 1935 event that celebrated the Tabor K.J.S.'s 20th anniversary, the preparations included a lot of work to put Beseda Hall, Sokol Park grounds, and the grandstand "in shape." The city's bandstand was moved opposite the grandstand and a loudspeaker installed. The grand two-day event included the usual range of events as well as an address by a Sokol leader from Chicago, visiting bands from Yankton and Omaha, and airplane flights and rides.³⁶⁵ In 1936, invited guests were the Schuetzenverein (German shooting club) from Bow Valley NE, who did a military drill with wooden guns, although the *Independent's* editor expressed mild dissent, commenting that "a display of the military is foreign to our ideals."³⁶⁶

Other K.J.S. events in the Opera House / Beseda Hall included lodge meetings, assorted parties, lectures by visiting instructors, fundraising bazaars, basket socials, dances, free movies, and drills or performances during other community and church events.³⁶⁷ They put on a two-day entertainment in March 1931 to raise money to help pay the debt on the purchase of the hall and fund new improvements.³⁶⁸ From 1933 to 1940, the Sokol annually hosted a "Gypsy Dance," with costumes encouraged.³⁶⁹ In 1938 to 1940, they held May Dances, encouraging attendees to dress with "women and girls in white dresses with red trimmings and ribbons, men in white shirts and vests and red ties—the Czech national colors."³⁷⁰ In 1934, a description of their annual meeting and election of officers before a meal and dance included a list of the food being served; it was duck, (sauer)kraut, and dumplings.³⁷¹ That summer, their bake sale fundraiser had included kolaches, rolls, doughnuts, and cakes.³⁷²

In 1933, the K.J.S. lodge officers included James C. Vlček as president and athletic director, L.A. Cimpl as vice-president, Irene Binder was instructor of the girls' section, and Anton Vancura was theatrical manager.³⁷³ Laddie Kostel and Stanley Wagner were the boys' trainers at

³⁶³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 August 1921—8 September 1921.

³⁶⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 2 February 1922—4 May 1922.

³⁶⁵ The bandstand was later moved out of Sokol Park in 1943. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 11 July 1935—22 April 1943.

³⁶⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 3 September 1936—10 September 1936.

³⁶⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 9 August 1928—23 October 1947.

³⁶⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 5 March 1931—19 March 1931.

³⁶⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 2 February 1933—1 February 1940.

³⁷⁰ The May Dance was held in 1946 again also. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 12 May 1938—15 May 1941.

³⁷¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 29 November 1934.

³⁷² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 23 August 1934.

³⁷³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 30 November 1933.

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different points.³⁷⁴ In the 1930s, Vlček, Cimpl, and Binder were also part of the Vranek district leadership.³⁷⁵ In 1937, the lodge had 250 members.³⁷⁶

The K.J.S. lodge established a dramatic department by the spring of 1917, “for the advancement of the social and cultural life of the community and for entertainment.” They first performed a three-act Bohemian play intended to instruct in Czech patriotism at Society Hall, which they traveled to nearby Lesterville, Dante, and Tyndall as well. J.A. Dvorak helped arrange the music used in the performances.³⁷⁷ In spring 1918, they dedicated the proceeds from that year’s performances national organizations working for Czech independence.³⁷⁸ From 1919 to 1939, they annually performed Bohemian plays at the Opera House and typically travelled the performances around to other Czech towns in the area too; they took the 1934 show to eleven locations with a tour through Nebraska. Most shows they picked were comedies, incorporated music by a local orchestra, and were followed by a dance.³⁷⁹ In the spring of 1924, they brought a comedy called “From Bohemian Mills” around to Wagner, Tyndall, Kimball, Geddes, Niobrara N.E., and back for a reprise in Tabor.³⁸⁰ A few of the other selections were “Michel and Matej” in 1923, “The Sumava Beauty” in 1925, and “The Blacksmith of Lešetin” in 1934—“one of the greatest patriotic plays of Bohemia” that was about a blacksmith fighting back against a German millionaire who tried to take over his village for a factory.³⁸¹ The K.J.S. also formed a Junior Dramatic Club that gave plays at least in 1930, 1936, and 1938.³⁸²

During WWII, new reports on Sokol athletic and drama activities thinned. However, in 1942, they gave another play as a church benefit. It featured Jarolim’s orchestra, Father Koman as director, and a plot that focused on Czech independence and the Great War. In 1943, there were brief additional notes on youth drill practices with instructor Helen Swatek, and the club participated in the 1944 Music Week festival.³⁸³

The Sokol continued as an organization, but increasingly as a social club, rather than continuing with the athletic program. In 1961 and 1962, they performed Czech plays that they also traveled to perform in several Nebraska towns. Contributing to their success were Albina Rezac doing music direction, Edmund Wagner doing stage direction, Laddie Kostel on stage and sets, and Anton Vancura on stage make-up.³⁸⁴ The K.J.S. disbanded in 1972.³⁸⁵

³⁷⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 September 1936—31 December 1936.

³⁷⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 7 September 1933—16 September 1937.

³⁷⁶ Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements*, 26-27.

³⁷⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 8 March 1917—26 April 1917; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 143.

³⁷⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 7 February 1918.

³⁷⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 1 May 1919—13 April 1939; Kucera, *Czech Drama*, 91.

³⁸⁰ J.A. Dvorak had also painted new scenery for their first performance in Tabor. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 3 April 1924—19 June 1924.

³⁸¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 22 March 1934—12 April 1934.

³⁸² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 24 April 1930—19 May 1938.

³⁸³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 26 March 1942—4 May 1944.

³⁸⁴ *The Frontier* (O’Neill City NE), 8 January 1961—22 June 1961; Kucera, *Czech Drama*, 91; Jennewein and Boorman, *Dakota Panorama*, 116.

³⁸⁵ Dockendorf, “New Leadership.”

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Sokol Tyrš

In 1929, the Z.C.B.J. supported the founding of a second Sokol organization in Tabor. It embraced the Czech cultural and physical aspects of Sokol but was not affiliated with the Catholic Church. An organizer from the National Sokol came from Omaha and spoke at the Z.C.B.J. hall to generate interest. Girls over 16 and boys over 18 could join even if they were not Z.C.B.J. members, and thirty signed up to start the group. The Sokol held most meetings and drills at Z.C.B.J. hall.³⁸⁶ Instructors from Omaha or Chicago sometimes visited for short periods or Tabor members traveled to attend courses.³⁸⁷ Eventually they named the group Sokol Tyrš, in honor of Miroslav Tyrš, one of the Czech founders of the Sokol movement. In November 1929, they started by giving a dance in the Opera House to fundraise for apparatus and equipment.³⁸⁸ The American Sokol Union officially initiated the Tabor chapter with a big event at Beseda Hall in June 1930 with addresses, a play, dinner, drills (held in Lincoln Park), and a beseda dance by eight boys and eight girls from Tyndall in “old Bohemian costume—a colorful and picturesque scene.”³⁸⁹ From 1931 to 1936, the Sokol Tyrš had annual anniversary festivals, usually in early June, with up to eleven visiting teams from their district in South Dakota and Nebraska. Festivals included drills and exhibitions, addresses, songs, plays, dances, and meals prepared and served by the women. Beseda Hall was one of the venues used for these larger gatherings.³⁹⁰ In 1933, the newspaper report said of the combined calisthenic drills that “it was a pretty sight to witness 125 bodies swaying in rhythmic agreement and harmony as one.”³⁹¹ They also traveled to area towns in South Dakota and Nebraska to participate in other clubs’ events, meets, and division exhibitions.³⁹² A small group from Tyndall and Tabor also went to Chicago for the massive Sokol exhibition held during the 1933 World’s Fair.³⁹³ Starting in the 1940s, activity in Tabor waned, even though instructors Didrich Maly from Czechoslovakia and Richard Molcar from Chicago came in October 1948 and April 1950 respectively to try and re-organize youth into Sokols.³⁹⁴

The Sokol Tyrš had their own dramatic club that performed annually from 1930 to 1936 in Beseda Hall, usually on or around New Year’s Eve with an accompanying orchestra and dance afterwards. They frequently travelled shows around to nearby towns.³⁹⁵ In October 1940, the Sokol Tyrš gave another Czech play in Beseda Hall to benefit the National Czech Alliance working “for the liberation of Czechoslovakia from the nazi looters and gangsters.” This was given in connection with the Z.C.B.J. district meeting being held at the hall also. That

³⁸⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 24 October 1929—4 May 1939.

³⁸⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 March 1930—28 March 1934.

³⁸⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 21 November 1929.

³⁸⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 15 May 1930—9 October 1930.

³⁹⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 28 May 1931—4 June 1936.

³⁹¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 8 June 1933.

³⁹² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 28 August 1930—8 June 1939; Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements*, 28-29.

³⁹³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 May 1933; Schuurmans, *One Hundred Years*, 89.

³⁹⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 7 October 1948—11 May 1950.

³⁹⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 March 1930—9 January 1936.

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December, they traveled the play to neighboring towns.³⁹⁶ During WWII, the news did not report any activity for the Sokol Tyrs club.

Beseda Dancers

In July 1936, a group of 32 people gathered in nearby Tyndall to practice dancing the beseda—“a combination of folk dances, vividly representing actions and customs of the Czechoslovak people”—for an American Legion convention in Yankton, accompanied by Jerry’s 24-piece band from Tabor. An instructor from Chicago had come to assist. The group also prepared to perform for a Czechoslovak Day celebration that the Z.C.B.J. planned to hold in Gregory that summer. They also performed the beseda during the Corn Palace festival in Mitchell in October.³⁹⁷

In August 1937, the Catholic Sokol in Tabor started a beseda dance group. Jos. Hlsak of Tyndall and Jos. Jarolim directed rehearsals. They planned to perform at Schuetzenfest, a community festival in Bow Valley NE hosted by the Catholic church there. There were sixteen couples—most from Tabor and a few from Tyndall—who traveled with Czech costumes and accompaniment from Jarolim’s band.³⁹⁸ The month after, for St. Wenceslaus Day, Tabor’s celebration included the beseda dancers’ performance and drills from Bow Valley’s Schuetzenverein.³⁹⁹ They also performed locally in Sokol Park, at Labor Day festivities in Wynot NE, in Gregory SD, and at the South Dakota State Fair in Huron “in colorful old Bohemian costumes.”⁴⁰⁰



Anna and Anton Cacek, Anna and James Schuch, and Frances and K.L. Szymanski, taken at Bow Valley, Nebraska, September 5, 1937. Collections of the Czech Heritage Preservation Society, Inc., Tabor.

³⁹⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 24 October 1940—12 December 1940.

³⁹⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 30 July 1936—8 October 1936.

³⁹⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 19 August 1937—26 August 1937.

³⁹⁹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 September 1937—30 September 1937.

⁴⁰⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 2 September 1937—16 September 1937.

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In February 1941, thirty-two beseda dancers from Tabor and Tyndall traveled to the Coliseum building in Sioux Falls to dance on the program of a Greek Relief event, at which “all nationalities now under the nazi heel will be represented.” They went with a sixteen-piece band and reported receiving “a real ovation” from the large crowd.⁴⁰¹

In June 1941, a Beseda Club formed in Tabor for “as many members as possible who are interested and might want to dance the Czech national dance at various doings and particularly at the Czech Day celebration” (detailed in next section). Both the Z.C.B.J. and the Catholic Workman supported the new club, with Edmund Wagner as the first president and James M. Schuch as secretary-treasurer.

During WWII, there were few news reports of the club, except that James Schuch directed local children for beseda performances at the 1942 Old Settlers Picnic in Springfield and the 1943 Labor Day celebration in Wagner.⁴⁰² In 1944, the women of Tabor’s Harmony Home Extension Club did beseda performances in costume for their state meeting in Yankton and the 4-H Achievement Day in Scotland, S.D.⁴⁰³

In 1947, the state Extension Service started hosting folk festivals at the State Fair that included Czech, Norwegian, Welsh, and American folk dances. Young people from both Tabor and Tyndall danced the Czech beseda, directed by Helen Swatek, at the fair from 1947 through at least 1950 when a separate South Dakota Folk Festival of Nations organization formed with the aim to continue similar events.⁴⁰⁴ The same Tabor-Tyndall group also performed for Wagner’s Labor Day celebration, in Elk Point for an Old Settlers’ Association picnic, for Founders’ Day at the state college in Springfield, and at the Mitchell Women’s Club’s Festival of Nations event at the Corn Palace.⁴⁰⁵

In Tabor in March 1950, thirty-six men and women re-organized the “Original Beseda Club.” In preparation for the local Czech Day celebration, they started weekly practices under the direction of James M. Schuch. His wife Anna Schuch was also noted as director in some reports. Anyone of high school age or older was welcome to join. They planned to have new costumes made, “following the conventional pattern but more beautiful than the club has ever had.”⁴⁰⁶ The club met regularly and held parties at Beseda Hall, did additional performances around the local area, and did some square dancing also.⁴⁰⁷ After a performance at the Nash Gymnasium at Yankton College, the Tabor newspaper reported that “the dances are doing good work in acquainting the public with this old Czech national dance.”⁴⁰⁸ The Schuchs’ daughter, Mildred Cimpl, was the

⁴⁰¹ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 6 February 1941—13 February 1941.

⁴⁰² *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 September 1942—9 September 1943.

⁴⁰³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 March 1944—31 August 1944.

⁴⁰⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 18 September 1947—21 September 1950; *Extension Service Review* 18(12) (December 1947), 157.

⁴⁰⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 September 1948—20 April 1950.

⁴⁰⁶ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 March 1950.

⁴⁰⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 12 October 1950—13 December 1951.

⁴⁰⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 2 November 1950.

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club's first president in 1950 and, with Anna, took over directing the group after James passed away in 1961.⁴⁰⁹

Today, the Beseda dancers do not have a regular club but gather especially for the annual Czech Days festival. The dancers are current and former residents, family, and more, and children can participate as well. Recently the dancers have numbered around 200 to 240 people.⁴¹⁰ In 2003, eighty-four couples danced the Beseda at Czech Days.⁴¹¹

Czech Days

Czech Days in Tabor is currently a two-day event held annually in June. Its antecedents can be seen in the periodic celebrations of Czech settlers' history and the big community events that Tabor had long held for religious holidays like St. Wenceslaus Day, jubilees, school carnivals, parish bazaars, and more. Tabor first held an event called "Czech Day" in 1941. In 1950, it was held again and has continued to be held each summer (though paused in 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic). Czech folkways through the beseda dance, music, foods, and clothing, as well as a parade and local history efforts have consistently been central to the festival.

Back in 1899, the nearby town of Tyndall held a summer celebration for the 30th anniversary of the Czech settlement society's arrival in South Dakota. One of the key speakers was Rev. Bouska from Tabor, and "music, speaking and feasting were the order of the day."⁴¹² In the late summers of 1913 and 1916, Tabor hosted two-day festivals that were held largely outdoors, with a tent for the main speeches and a bowery platform for the dances. Governor Frank M. Byrne was a key speaker for both. The 1913 event included the Pioneers' Association of Bon Homme County reunion on the first day and "Bohemian Day" on the second—the news announcement concluded: "Everybody come both days whether you are Irish, Dutch, Bohemian or anything else. We want you all regardless of nationality." The 1916 event was called the Galadays (or Gala Days) Festival. At both, there were speeches, bands and carnival on the street, baseball games, and evening dances. The 1916 event also had a big parade, races, and, before the ball game, an automobile stunt show by Savidge Bros.⁴¹³ In August 1936, the Z.C.B.J. in Gregory (about 75 miles west of Tabor) hosted a state Czechoslovak Day festival. The Tabor band and Sokol Tyrs participated in the celebration, along with bands and groups from Winner, Tyndall, and also Verdigre NE. Z.C.B.J. lodges from South Dakota as well as six Nebraska and two North Dakota sent delegates. Attendance was estimated around 7,000. The event program included a grand parade, Sokol drills, beseda dances, a Czech play, and an address by Governor Tom Berry, who had homesteaded in Gregory County before settling near Belvidere.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁹ *Argus-Leader* (Sioux Falls SD), 2 January 2001—3 April 2013; Brochure for 51st Annual Czech Days Celebration, June 18 and 19, 1999, in "Tabor," Vertical File, S.D. State Archives, Pierre; Cwach, "Czech Immigration," 4; *Bon Homme County History*, 271.

⁴¹⁰ Dockendorf, "New Leadership."

⁴¹¹ Cwach, "Czech Immigration," 4.

⁴¹² *Custer Weekly Chronicle* (SD), 15 July 1899—22 July 1899; *Dakota Chief* (Gann Valley SD), 20 July 1899; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 57.

⁴¹³ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 28 August 1913—17 August 1916; Dvorak, *Memorial Book*, 144.

⁴¹⁴ Křižan, *Souvenir*, 3, 12; Johansen, *Immigrant Settlements*, 28-29.

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Tabor held its first Czech Day celebration at the end of August 1941. Both the district Z.C.B.J. (including Bon Homme, Yankton, and Charles Mix Counties) and the Catholic Workman lodges of Tabor and Dante worked together on the event. Through ticket sales, they sought to raise funds for the Czech National Alliance and the Czech Catholic Alliance to support the Czech government-in-exile, soldiers, and pilots fighting from England against Nazi Germany. The Tabor newspaper advertised that attendees “will gather for the purpose of manifesting their Americanism and at the same time help those less fortunate who have temporarily lost these sacred privileges under the brutal heel of the nazi regime,” and Czech Day was “not held merely for Czechoslovak relief, but a protest against the brutality of nazi gangsters who have terrorized and enslaved peoples in Europe including their own as well.” The local planning committee included six men from the Z.C.B.J. and Workman lodges, led by chair L.A. Cimpl and secretary Joseph V. Hladky. The event included a procession to mass; grand parade; baseball game; refreshment stand; singing of the U.S. and Czech national hymns; speeches by U.S. Senator Chan Gurney of Yankton and Rev. W.A. Dostal of Fort Atkinson, Iowa; drills by the Tyndall Sokol; Beseda dances by adult and children’s groups (who had been rehearsing over the summer); two meals served; municipal band concert; and public dance. Except for mass, the parade, and the ball game, all events were at Beseda Hall and Sokol Park. Because of the anticipated crowds for the evening’s public dance, they had a bowery platform put up in Sokol Park for additional space and arranged two dance orchestras to perform. Additionally, the Greek heritage AHEPA (American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association) lodge of Sioux Falls and a Hollander (Dutch) group from Orange City, Iowa, exhibited folk dances and traditional clothing from their cultures. Tabor’s Beseda dancers had previously performed at those groups’ earlier events—all of which raised funds for the war effort. The *Independent* reported that an estimated 3,000 people attended and about \$1,000 was raised after expenses.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁵ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 22 May 1941—16 October 1941.

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Assorted photographs by Martin J. Honner, engravings by Gunderson (Yankton), printed courtesy of the *Yankton Press & Dakotan* in the *Tabor Independent* (SD), 4 September 1941.

In 1942, 1943, and 1949, the Commercial Club held other two-day town festivals at various points in the summer, but these events did not explicitly incorporate Czech cultural traditions. They did include evening dances in Beseda Hall, Art B. Thomas Shows, baseball, music, and movies.⁴¹⁶

In September 1949, the Tabor Commercial Club met in Beseda Hall to discuss planning an event that they could hold annually. They scheduled a Czech Day festival for June 5th and 6th, 1950, and Leonard Cimprl was chair. Included would be the Art B. Thomas Shows, baseball games, a Yankton municipal band concert with director Joe Jarolim, and an evening dance in Beseda Hall with Johnny Matuska and his WNAX Bohemian Band—“all dressed in Czech costume.” However, “the main feature of the celebration will be baked Kolaches and rolls to be served by

⁴¹⁶ The Art B. Thomas Co. had started in 1928 in Lennox, S.D., and provided carnival rides, concessions, and performers like acrobats, cycling acts, and magicians. *Tabor Independent* (SD), 21 May 1942—21 July 1949; “About,” Thomas Carnival Inc., accessed online, 15 May 2024, <https://thomascarnival.com/>.

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the ladies of Tabor [and the] high light will be the native dance ‘Beseda’ by the boys and girls of Tabor, dressed in native Czech costume.” The Commercial Club also organized booster caravans of over twenty automobiles that drove to neighboring towns on May 25th and 26th to promote the event. The Tabor newspaper reported that Czech Day was a big success, and that the Altar and Rosary Society’s kolaches and rolls had sold out.⁴¹⁷

The 1951 Czech Day had a similar line-up and similar success. The main addition was a parade on the first afternoon, which featured color guards, the Tabor municipal band, the Tyndall high school band, Jarolim’s band from Yankton, floats by local organizations like the volunteer fire department, and marching groups of beseda dancers and school children. The evening dance featured the orchestra Dick Stahl and his Royal Bohemians.⁴¹⁸ In 1952 was held the first crowning of a Czech Day queen.⁴¹⁹ For the 1954 event, a planned addition was a grain-cutting demonstration with early-day harvesting equipment.⁴²⁰ A 1961 local history noted that the women had sold about 1,200 kolache the previous year.⁴²¹ The 1961 Czech Days included a high school band concert, the beseda dancers, Sokol Royal United shows, a Czech-language operetta, a parade ending in Sokol Park, the Tabor 1890 band performing “old time music and songs,” temporary museum exhibits, and the crowning of a Czech Days prince and princess as well as queen.⁴²² Prominent guests and featured performers have included Chicago accordionist Lou Prohut in 1965, Czechoslovakian film crews in 1975, and the new Czech envoy to the U.S. in 1979.⁴²³ In 1964, Czech Days was dedicated to L.A. Cimpl who had been instrumental in the 1941 event as well as being a long-time mayor and business leader in Tabor.⁴²⁴ In 1965, the honoree was J.A. Dvorak, who had passed away in September 1964.⁴²⁵ Among the many dedications, there have also been: Matt Petrik in 1967, the town’s first teacher Joseph Zitka in 1976, Mildred Cimpl in 2015, and Helen Vlasak in 2016.⁴²⁶

⁴¹⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 1 September 1949—8 June 1950; *Bon Homme County History*, 281.

⁴¹⁸ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 28 December 1950—14 June 1951.

⁴¹⁹ *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 57; *Bon Homme County History*, 281.

⁴²⁰ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 23 July 1953.

⁴²¹ *A History of Bon Homme County* (1961), 57.

⁴²² *Daily Republic* (Mitchell SD), 2 June 1961; *Bon Homme County History*, 281.

⁴²³ *Daily Republic* (Mitchell SD), 15 June 1965; *Aberdeen Daily News* (SD), 22 October 1975—30 October 1975; 12 June 1979.

⁴²⁴ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 10 March 1949—7 April 1949; *Bon Homme County History*, 282.

⁴²⁵ *Daily Republic* (Mitchell SD), 15 June 1965.

⁴²⁶ *Tyndall Tribune* (SD), 22 April 1976; *Yankton Press & Dakotan* (SD), 20 May 2015; *Bon Homme County History*, 282.

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“Tabor 1890 Czech Band, Czech Days, June 24 & 25, 1957.” Collection of the Czech Heritage Preservation Society, Inc.



S.D. Department of Highways, “Dancing at Czech Days, Tabor, Bon Homme County,” ID: #2023-05-01-304, South Dakota State Historical Society, State Archives, Pierre.

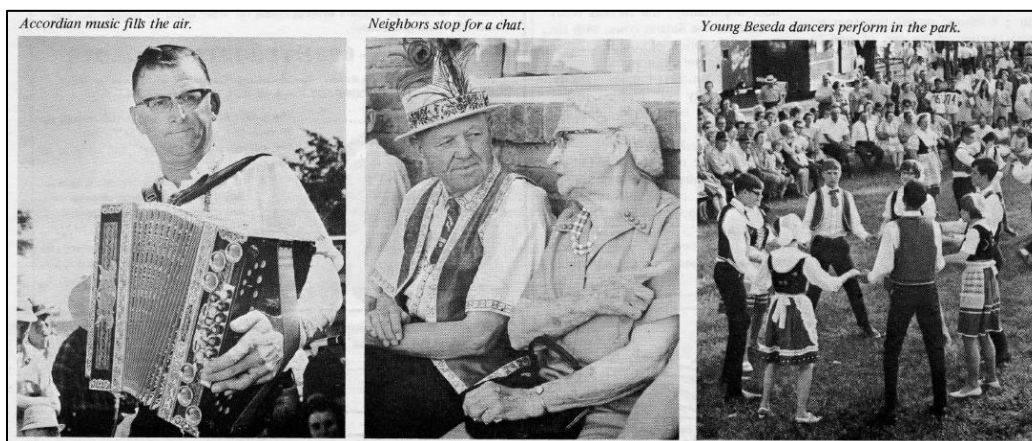
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For the centennial of Tabor's town founding in 1972, Czech Days became a "Czech-ennial" celebration under chairman Laddie Kostel, which was held over four days with a historical pageant in addition to usual dances, music, coronations, and parades. Xavia Arndt directed the pageant, which they held on a platform built on the south side of Beseda Hall and open to their audience in Sokol Park. The scenes started with the 1869 gathering in Frank Bem's tavern in Chicago and covered the town's founding, schools, churches, business, homesteading, social organizations, bands and dances, railroads, newspapers, civic improvements, the start of Czech Days, and up to the high school and St. Wenceslaus schools' closings in 1971.⁴²⁷



North Plains Today 4(6) (June 1972), 1, in "Tabor," Vertical File, S.D. State Archives, Pierre.

For the U.S. Bicentennial, Tabor put on many commemorative events and entertainments from October 1975 through the Fourth of July 1976, including Czech Days in June. Laddie Kostel served as chairman for the Bicentennial committee. Events focused on cultural heritage of Czech clothing, food, language, and dance; town founders and early pioneers; local churches; and ceremonies for Veterans and Memorial Day holidays. Seven of the eleven planned events were held in Beseda Hall, including a reenactment of the town's founding.⁴²⁸ In the summer of 1976, a small film crew from Czechoslovakia planned to visit Tabor for Czech Days while making a film marking the Bicentennial and the lives of Czech and Slovak American communities.⁴²⁹

In more recent decades, Czech Days events have included a craft show, noodle sales, kolache and other baking demonstrations, polka dance-off contests, amateur baseball games, and fireworks. The events have also continued to have a parade, carnival, the crowning of Czech Days royalty, and the traditions of Czech music, dramatics, and dance. In addition to Beseda Hall and Sokol Park, activities also happen on Lidice Street, at the church, school gym, community center, and in Leonard Cimpl Park. Public dances have been held in Beseda Hall, while beseda dance shows, concerts, and crowning events are held in Sokol Park. Memorial ceremonies have been held in the Czech Heritage Preservation Society's Vancura Park museum

⁴²⁷ *Daily Republic* (Mitchell SD), 19 June 1972; *Tabor Centennial Pageant*; *B-Y's Lines Salutes Tabor Centennial*.

⁴²⁸ Comprehensive Calendar of Bicentennial Events, State-by-State Event Details, Listed by Date (Washington D.C.: American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, October 1975); *Tyndall Tribune* (SD), 22 April 1976.

⁴²⁹ *Daily Republic* (Mitchell SD), 22 October 1975.

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village (across Chicago St. from Sokol Park), and there have been “polka masses” at St. Wenceslaus Church, for which “traditional songs are re-written with religious lyrics and sung in English and Czech.”⁴³⁰ Performers have included the Bon Homme High School Bohemian Band, the Dick Zavadny Band, the Tabor 1890 Band, and Tabor Beseda Dancers.⁴³¹ The 1890 Band often features music written in Tabor in the late nineteenth century.⁴³² The sponsors have included the Tabor Chamber of Commerce/Community Club, the American Legion and Auxiliary, Beseda Hall, the Sokol club, the Catholic Workmen, the St. Wenceslaus Altar Society, the baseball club, the fire dept, the Czech Heritage Preservation Society, and the 4-H club.⁴³³

Opera Houses and Dance Halls in South Dakota

Towns in South Dakota and the Great Plains region commonly had at least one theater or “opera house” for local performances, traveling shows, vaudeville, musical concerts, political rallies, conventions, and more. The buildings typically had a long, deep layout with a tall ceiling, an elevated stage on the back wall, and some preparation/storage space for cast and crew behind or below the stage. There might be a ticket booth, balcony, auditorium seating, a proscenium arch, dressing rooms, etc. in a wide variety of sizes and architectural elaboration. For scenery, rolled curtains and drops were more common than having a full fly loft or tower above the stage. Theaters built to accommodate multiple uses had flat seating areas that could be adapted for temporary use as a dance floor, roller-skating rink, or basketball court. If meant for performances alone, floors were often sloped or stepped to provide better views for the audience. A few, like the Grand Opera House in Dell Rapids, had a combination of flat floors in front and raised levels at back.

Opera house managers dealt with scheduling events, booking touring shows, selling tickets, and preparing and cleaning the venue. Even when they were utilitarian wood-frame, false-front buildings, town leaders and boosters often pointed to opera houses as a point of pride—a way to attract residents, visitors, and businesses. Where resources allowed, opera houses and theaters could be far more elaborate than many surrounding structures. Some towns had purpose-built opera houses, though it was also common to incorporate them into the second floors of commercial main street buildings. For occasional lantern slide shows or silent movies in their era, operators could bring in projection equipment for those events. As movies grew in popularity, opera house owners sometimes added projector rooms; and around the 1930s or later, some venues fully converted to movie theaters.⁴³⁴

In South Dakota, several elaborate opera houses in larger towns have been preserved and restored (some still in-process), such as those in Dell Rapids, Pierre, Spearfish, Lead, Sioux

⁴³⁰ Czech Days brochures 1980-1999, in “Tabor,” Vertical File, S.D. State Archives, Pierre; “Czech Days film debuts tonight in Tabor.” *Daily Republic* (Mitchell SD), 18 June 2008; “Polka Time in Tabor (revised),” *South Dakota Magazine* (May/June 2009); *Platte Enterprise* (SD), 10 June 2010.

⁴³¹ Czech Days brochures 1980-1999, in “Tabor,” Vertical File, S.D. State Archives, Pierre; “Czech Days film debuts tonight in Tabor.” *Daily Republic* (Mitchell SD), 18 June 2008.

⁴³² Cwach, “Czech Immigration,” 4.

⁴³³ Czech Days brochures 1980-1999, in “Tabor,” Vertical File, S.D. State Archives, Pierre.

⁴³⁴ Ronald L. Davis, “Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and The Dakotas: 1870-1920,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 9 (Winter 1989), 13-23; Perrin, “A History,” 2, 25-26, 37, 39, 49, 144.

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Falls, Yankton, Aberdeen, and Watertown.⁴³⁵ Opera houses in smaller communities like Wessington Springs, Hartford, Delmont, Doland, and Garden City have been kept standing, though some are seldom used. Wessington Springs' Opera House, built in 1905, still hosts school drama performances and various concerts. Several, like those at Summit and Custer have been highly modified architecturally, with replacement siding and altered entrances. Others have been lost to fire or demolition over the past few decades, such as the Metropolitan Opera House (State Theatre) in Mitchell in 2004 and the Selby Opera House in 2024.

Public dance halls also were historically numerous in South Dakota and had immense roles in the social and recreational life of the community, especially smaller towns. They could either be built for the purpose or incorporated into multi-use buildings, and they were operated by individuals, municipalities, or organizations like American Legions or fire departments. Stages were often low and just for the musicians' use unless the venue was also used as a theater/auditorium. Refreshment stands were common and might be either located inside, in an addition, or free-standing nearby (in park settings). Pavilion type buildings usually had board doors around the upper walls to open to the air, sometimes with screens, and were used only when the season was warm enough.

Communities held dances for social and recreational purposes, for holiday celebrations, and as fundraisers for different organizations or causes. For instance, many fire companies and veterans' organizations held dances annually with ticket income going to operations, equipment, or civic projects. It was not uncommon for families and a wide age range of people to attend dances, especially for "old time" style music like polka bands. Local bands and musicians—who typically had other work for their primary income—played most dances, but "road" or "territory" bands also toured regularly across multiple states.⁴³⁶ For instance, Joe Fejfar, who sometimes played with the Tabor band, organized his Old Time Orchestra in Yankton in 1931. They regularly went on multi-week tours that reached thirteen states and one Canada province before Fejfar's death in 1940.⁴³⁷ Bohemian bands were popular even beyond Czech-majority areas, especially after they were heard widely via radio through WNAX and other stations. Bands often carried their own sound and lighting equipment, though some hall owners added equipment to their venues over time, especially for local bands to use. By the late 20th century, public dances held a less-prominent role in small-town South Dakota because of changes in entertainment options and rural demographics.⁴³⁸ However, some social clubs continued to hold dances periodically, many bars had dance floors, and the larger cities had a few commercial nightclubs.

⁴³⁵ Ried Holien, "South Dakota Opera Houses Are Staging Comebacks," *South Dakota Magazine* (March/April 1997, as revised).

⁴³⁶ Harl A. Dalstrom and Kay Calamé Dalstrom. "Dance Band on the Northern Plains: Bob Calamé and His Music in North Dakota, 1949-1957," *North Dakota History* 46(3) (Summer 1979), 4, 6, 10; Harl A. Dalstrom and Kay Calamé Dalstrom, "'Back by Popular Demand!': Dancing in Small-Town South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 32(4) (2002), 283-288.

⁴³⁷ *Tabor Independent* (SD), 16 January 1936—20 June 1940; *The International Musician* 39(2) (August 1940), 14.

⁴³⁸ Dalstrom and Dalstrom, "Dance Band," 7, 12, 14; Dalstrom and Dalstrom, "Back by Popular Demand" 293, 307.

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In South Dakota, a few historic small-town dance halls are extant and have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. (*In the following examples, the National Register of Historic Places reference number is included in parentheses.*) The multi-functional 1918 Municipal Building in Conde (#SG100009811) had a dance hall in its basement. The small corner stage is still in the building, but the space is not currently used. Multi-functional community halls with stages include the 1924 American Legion Hall (#05000034) in Faulkton, the 1926 Wewela Hall (#10000952), the 1926 Grace Coolidge Memorial Log Building (Custer Community Center) (#01000680) in Custer, and the 1933 American Legion Community Hall (#100001403) in Fort Pierre. The Japanese Garden Pavilion (#94001390) in Flandreau city's park is a low wood frame building with a large dance floor and a deep stage at the center of the east wall, at a level of about three or four feet above the floor. Of similar type, the Wylie Park Pavilion (#78002540) outside Aberdeen was built c.1907 and has a raised stage. The Flandreau and Aberdeen pavilions can still be rented for events. The c.1921 Butte/Lawrence County fairgrounds (#86000934) by Nisland still has a large octagonal pavilion historically used in part for agricultural exhibits but also as a dance hall. The 1920s pavilion in Spearfish's city park is standing but has been extensively remodeled. Many others have been demolished or burned down, such as Groveland Park dance hall in Tyndall, the Broadway Ballroom in Centerville, the Lake Madison Ballroom, and the pavilions at Ruskin Park, Dell Rapids city park, Island Park by Milltown, and Rest Haven by Lake Andes.⁴³⁹

CONCLUSION

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park are significant to the history of South Dakota for the property's deep history of Czech music, dance, drama, language, and cultural gathering. There were public dances with Czech and popular music, wedding dances open to the community, school carnivals, basketball games, movies, political rallies, women's fundraising suppers, parish card parties, civic meetings on important issues of the day, "home talent" and traveling theater performances in the Czech language that told Czech stories, somber lectures on and commemorations of European wars and the resulting need for aid relief, Sokol athletic demonstrations that brought Czech American communities together, and beseda folk dances whose dancers became local ambassadors for Czech heritage. From the 1918 remodel of a modest dance hall into an opera house, and throughout the subsequent physical changes to the hall and the addition of the adjacent park, the property has been a central landmark for the town of Tabor and the Czech descendant community in the wider surrounding area. Beseda Hall and Sokol Park are nominated under Criterion A at a state level of significance in the areas of Social History, Performing Arts, Entertainment/Recreation, and Czech Ethnic Heritage for the period 1918 to the present.

⁴³⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, "An Island of Memories: Milltown's Island Park Ballroom to be Inducted into S.D. Rock Hall," *Yankton Press & Dakotan* (SD), 6 January 2012; Becky Tycz, "Iconic Groveland Park dance hall comes down," *Tyndall Tribune & Register* (SD), 6 December 2023; Venues search, South Dakota Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, accessed online 9 May 2024, <https://www.southdakotarockandrollmusicassociation.com/our-inductees/inductee-search>.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): BO00000383

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than 1

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

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1. Zone: 14	Easting: 609408.8934	Northing: 4756036.1348
2. Zone: 14	Easting: 609472.5820	Northing: 4756036.1697
3. Zone: 14	Easting: 609474.1484	Northing: 4755979.1677
4. Zone: 14	Easting: 609409.1726	Northing: 4755977.4767

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated property includes the south 52 feet of the north half, and the south half of Lot 2 of Block 5 of the Original Town of Tabor.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The National Register boundary includes the lots on which Beseda Hall and Sokol Park are and have historically been located.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Liz J. Almlie
organization: South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office
street & number: 900 Governors Drive
city or town: Pierre state: SD zip code: 57501
e-mail: shpo@state.sd.us
telephone: 605-773-3458
date: 9 August 2024

Additional Documentation


Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
 Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
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National Register of Historic Places Nomination Review Map




south dakota
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION


National Register Boundary

NOMINATION FOR:
 Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
 115 N. Lidice St.
 Tabor,
 Bon Homme County, SD

UTM Coordinates
 Zone 14, NAD 1983
 1. E: 609408.1906;
 N: 4756033.9292
 2. E: 609472.1761;
 N: 4756035.9315
 3. E: 609472.7770;
 N: 4755977.7147
 4. E: 609410.3955;
 N: 4755978.0278

SOUTH DAKOTA COUNTIES





Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
 Name of Property

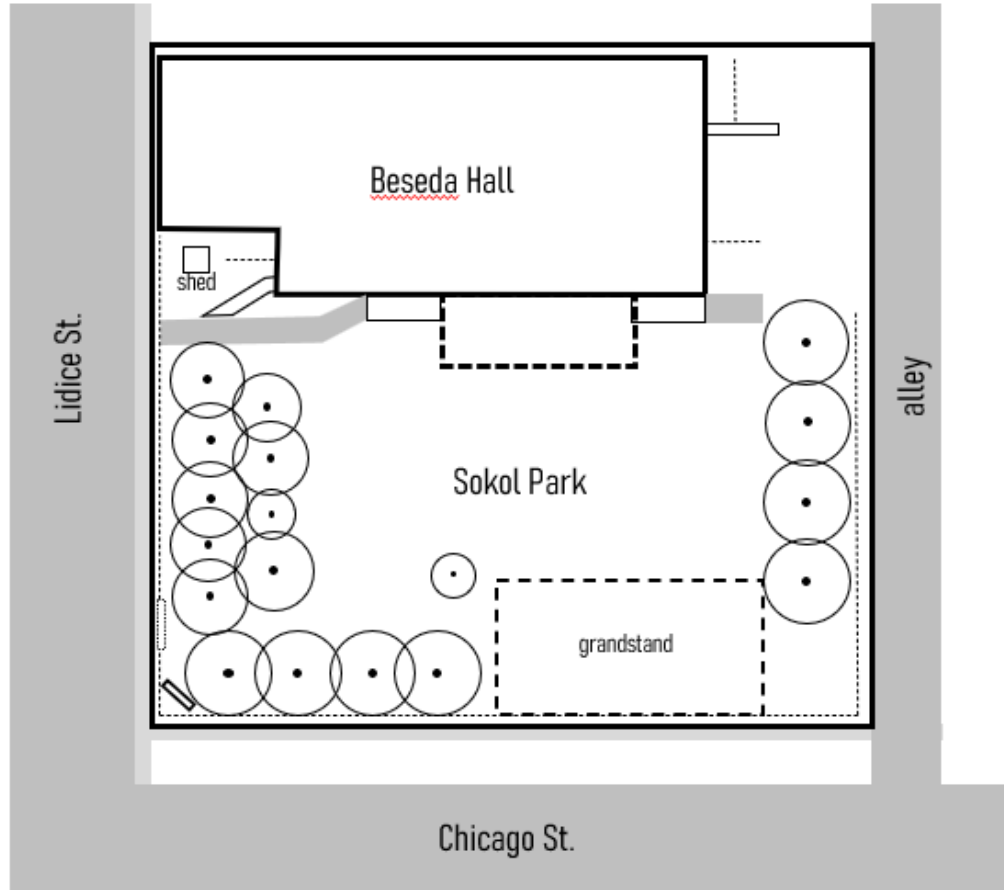
Bon Homme County, SD
 County and State

National Register of Historic Places Nomination Review Map	 <p>south dakota STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> National Register Boundary NOMINATION FOR: Beseda Hall and Sokol Park 115 N. Lidice St. Tabor, Bon Homme County, SD	UTM Coordinates Zone 14, NAD 1983 1. E: 609408.1906; N: 4756033.9292 2. E: 609472.1761; N: 4756035.9315 3. E: 609472.7770; N: 4755977.7147 4. E: 609410.3955; N: 4755978.0278	SOUTH DAKOTA COUNTIES 
				

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State

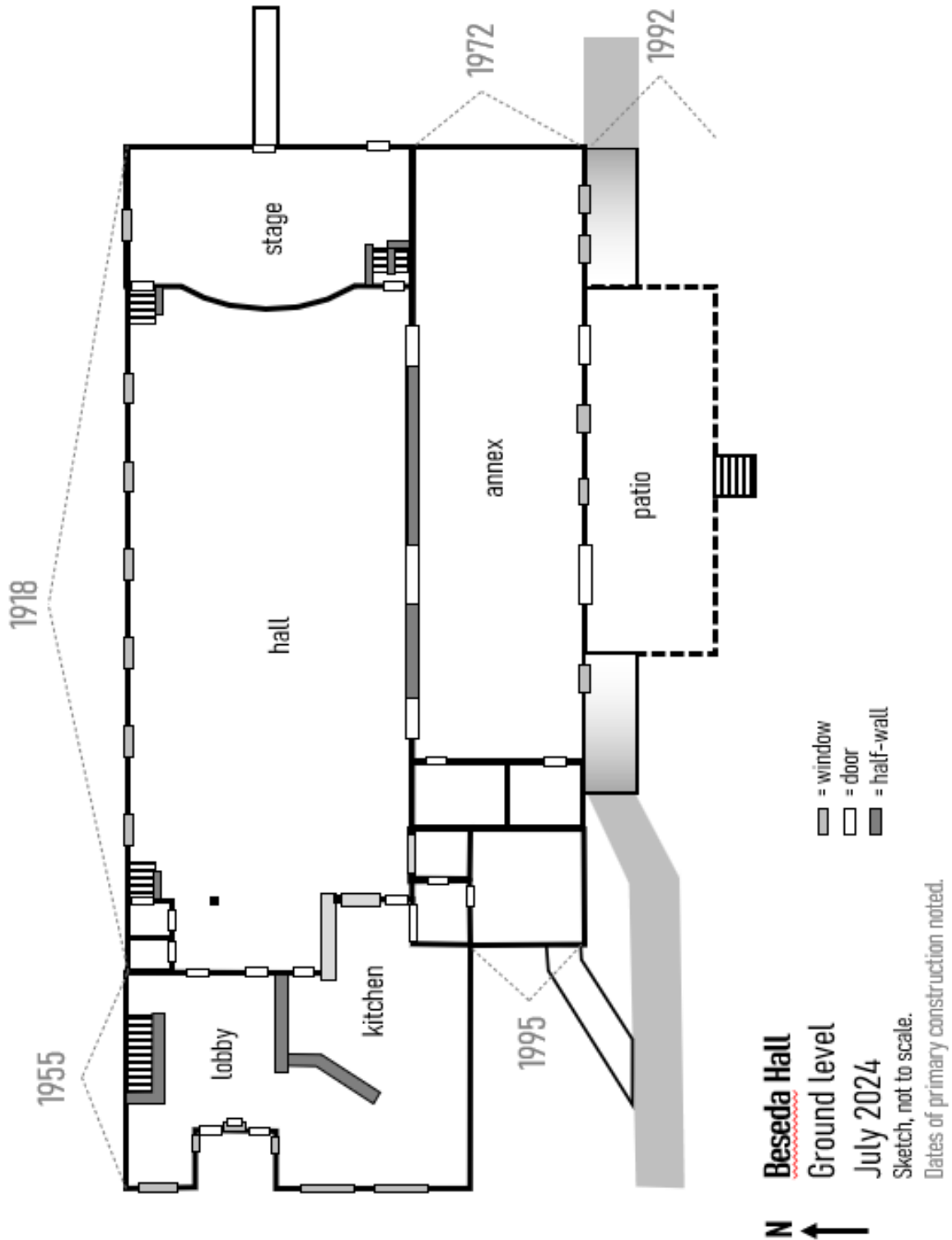
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.



N
↑
Beseda Hall & Sokol Park
Site plan ○ = tree
July 2024 - - - - - = chain-link fence
Sketch, not to scale.

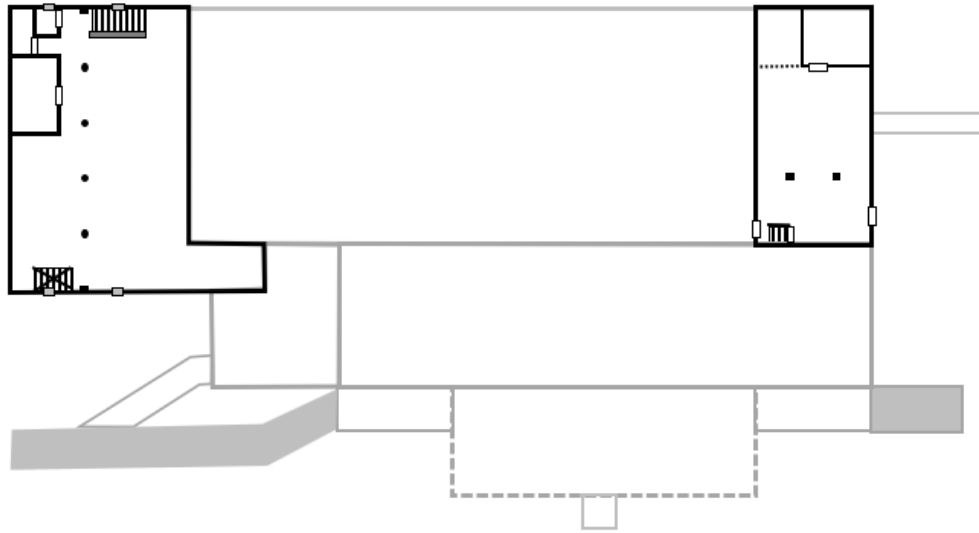
Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
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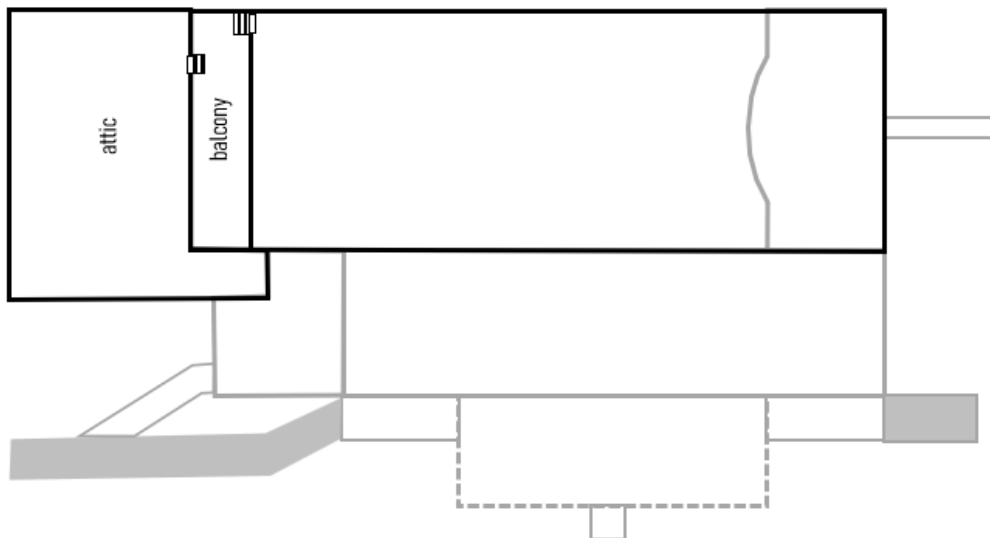
Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



N
↑
Beseda Hall
Basement level
July 2024
Sketch, not to scale.

□ = window
□ = door
■ = half-wall



N
↑
Beseda Hall
Balcony/Attic level
August 2023
Sketch, not to scale.

□ = door

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Beseda Hall and Sokol Park

City or Vicinity: Tabor

County: Bon Homme State: South Dakota

Photographer: Liz Almlie

Date Photographed: August 22, 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0001
View of west façade, camera facing northeast.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0002
View of west façade, camera facing southeast.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0003
View of west entrance bay, camera facing east.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0004
View of south elevation façade, camera facing northeast.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0005
View of south elevation, camera facing north.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0006
View of patio and Sokol Park, camera facing west.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0007
View of south and east elevations, camera facing northwest.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0008
View of east and north elevations, camera facing southwest.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0009
View of Sokol Park and grandstand, camera facing southwest.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0010
View of grandstand in Sokol Park, camera facing northwest.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0011
Wide view of Beseda Hall and Sokol Park, camera facing northeast.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0012
View of lobby entrance, camera facing west.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0013
View of lobby, north of entrance, camera facing west.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0014
View of lobby and hall entrance, camera facing southeast.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0015
View of lobby and kitchen, camera facing south.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0016
View of kitchen, camera facing east.



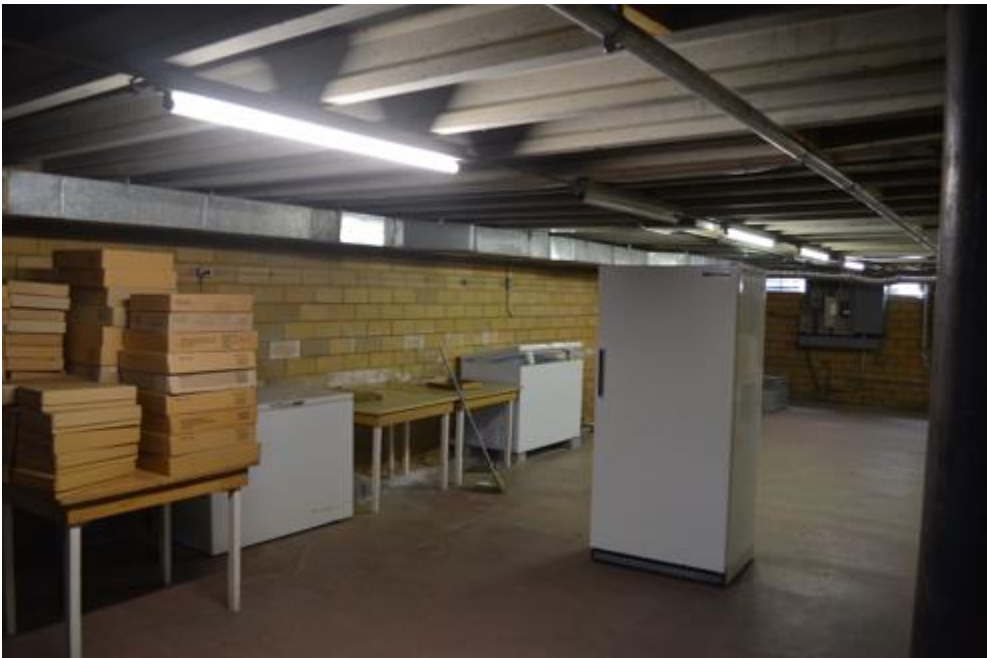
SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0017
View of lobby and kitchen, south of entrance, camera facing southwest.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0018
View of lobby basement, camera facing northeast.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0019
View of lobby basement, camera facing southeast.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0020
View of hall entrance, camera facing northwest.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0021
View of hall, camera facing west.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0022
View of hall, camera facing east.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0023
View of hall stage, camera facing northeast.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0024
View of stage movie drop, camera facing southeast.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0025
View of stage scene drop, camera facing southeast.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0026
View of hall from stage, camera facing west.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0027
View of stage staircase, camera facing west.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0028
View of stage basement, camera facing north.



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0029
View of hall into annex, camera facing southeast.

Beseda Hall and Sokol Park
Name of Property

Bon Homme County, SD
County and State



SD_BonHommeCounty_BesedaHallSokolPark_0030
View of annex, camera facing west.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.