

THE PEOPLE AND COUNTRY

The Highlands are not showy. Their colors push through heavily from the earth and stone, as well as everything else which grows and ripens here. The light also behaves differently: as if it remembered something, and came down from a great height to give the crops sweetness and juice. People did not have an easy life here. Yet still they did not prefer the lowlands, where there is more springtime and less winter. They remained faithful and this faithfulness has been proven on innumerable occasions.

(M. Bureš. Highlands Amorous)

The community of Sulkovec and its local part Polom are situated in the most northern part of the Žďár district. The average altitude of the community ranges from 610 to 765 meters above sea level. A local saying claims that the winter lasts for eight months here and that it is cold for another four; people know that in Sulkovec they have to get one more coat than in Nyklovice (a village nearby). June frosts and strong year-round winds are noted in the school chronicle of Sulkovec. Regarding the cold earth, there is little hope for a good harvest here. *In 1888 the last snow came on June 22 and the last frost on July 2. Also, fruit cultivation will never reach a high level here, despite the good intentions of the locals. Only a limited variety of apple and pear trees can prosper here; plums never ripen. There is, however, a special kind of cherry tree that is worth mentioning: the bird cherry, which ripens here a month later than in warmer areas, depending on whether frost had not already damaged the blossoms.*

The number of inhabitants has gradually decreased since the mid 19th century. In 1869, there were 329 inhabitants in Sulkovec and 197 in Polom; during the last census of 1991, there were 165 inhabitants in Sulkovec and 77 in Polom. By the end of 1999, the total number was 215: 160 in Sulkovec and 55 in Polom.

Sulkovec is a cadastral community, and it has been a parish village since times immemorial. It lies 20 kilometers northwest of the town of Kunštát. The community was established at the historical borders of the Moravian lands, close to the road going from the village of Olešnice to Jimramov. As can be seen from a cadastral map of 1826, in previous centuries the road went across the northern part of the common land of Sulkovec, between the village and woods of

Bystré. The name *old road* has remained and the road is still being used today; visitors perceive it as a particularly scenic field road, which is lined with noteworthy crosses. One of them, a stone cross, is erected on the borders of the Sulkovec and Nyklovice cadastres. The inscription reads:

*Stay here my son my daughter
Where do you go?
Keep my picture in your heart
Your departure will be a happy one*

Another cross, made of cast iron, is erected on the crossing with the road to Bystré. Further on, in the direction of Nedvězí, the *Hajnýho kříž* (Gamekeeper's Cross) is set between two maple trees, creating a scenic countryside.

By 1960, Sulkovec was the northern-most and at the same time the western-most community in the legislative district of Kunštát. According to 1903 data, Sulkovec and its land covered an area of 4.33 square kilometers; in 1907 Polom occupied 4.21 square kilometers. At present, the area of the whole cadastral territory of both communities is 854 hectares. Administratively, Sulkovec used to be a part of the political district of Boskovice, but legislatively belonged to the district of Kunštát. Polom used to be a part of the political district of Nove Mesto na Morave, but legislatively belonged to the Bystrice nad Pernštejnem district.

In the past, the life of the inhabitants of Sulkovec never differed very much from the common destiny of other rural inhabitants of the Moravian countryside. This has been proven in several stark biographies which can be found in an especially valued source, the *Hasická kronika* (The Fire Brigade Chronicles) of individual fire-fighting squads in Moravia. It was written by Titus Krška and published in 1898. Some important paragraphs concerning Sulkovec and Polom give more details than just the activity of local fire squads. For instance, the chronicle mentions farmer Jan Dvořák, who was also the mayor of Sulkovec, an important supporter of progress, and the founder of the local fire squad. Dvořák was born in 1855. His destiny, as well as those of his neighbors from Sulkovec and Polom, is worth citing from the chronicle: *He spent his youth in his father's house; he attended the local one-room school. Later on he spent three years as a dragoon, then he inherited his father's farmstead, the largest one in Sulkovec. He was an excellent landowner. Apart from farming, he was also interested in bee-keeping, fish farming,*

and mainly gardening. In similar details, the chronicle depicts the destiny of Josef Novák, a tradesman who was born in 1831. *He spent his youth in Sulkovec, where he attended a one-room school. Later on he inherited the cottage at number 31, having no other possessions than his two healthy hands. But he was persistent, diligent, thrifty, and in very good health. He managed to establish a small shop, then he bought house number 18 in Sulkovec, became a tradesman, and gained about five measures of land. At present, he is a well-to-do citizen, and has been widely respected for his open and honest character. For several years he has been a member of the community board, of which he spent six years as president of the local school board, three years as head of the church board, and six years as the leading community councilor.*

It is evident, that the majority of inhabitants of Sulkovec and Polom earned their living in agriculture. This is still true today, although in the mid-1950s the form of farming changed due to the establishment of united agricultural co-operative (JZD in Czech). Besides those who had exclusively been peasants in the past, there were other farmers in our communities who were involved in other professions as well. In the beginning of the 20th century, in Polom, the smaller community, there were several trades besides farming: Josef Dobiáš was a smith and horseshoer, František Straka was a shoemaker, and Josef Procházka was a joiner. In Sulkovec, which had more people, there were more specialized professions. At the end of the 19th century, Titus Krška wrote that the inhabitants of the village made their living as farmers, tailors, and weavers, although not to the same extent as before. The Moravian Address Book, written by Chytil in 1911, specifies that in Sulkovec the smith was Josef Jílek, tailors Josef Mareček, František Nykodym, and Josef Nykodym, joiners Bohuslav Dvořák and Josef Leinweber, Josef Krčil ran a grocery store, and Anna Žilková was a midwife. By the last quarter of the 19th century, the inhabitants of both villages were involved in flax trade, as is evident from old records and the recollections of the elders. One particular material remnant of this trade is the house of a flax mill in Sulkovec, which was maintained and then restored for residential purposes, as house no. 48. Its last inhabitant was Petronila Ondrová. Flax cultivation ceased to be economically profitable; recent attempts to renew the growing of flax in the area failed some ten years ago. When eyewitnesses speak about the old days, they recollect that *it was only Tomáš Pech who made baskets here; more people made brooms, and some made shingles.*

In the interwar period, there was a tobacconist's in Sulkovec. Antonin Jílek operated it in the same house as his store with alcohol, rye liquor, and brandy. Sulkovec also has a community employee nicknamed the *Order-maker*. Before the public community radio system was established, one of his duties was to announce communal resolutions and news to the inhabitants; he drew attention to this activity by loud drumming. His real name was František Dvořák. He used to go bare-foot, so people could see his special wound from the First World War: he had a small hole in the sole of his foot that he could draw a straw through it. People in Sulkovec still remember him: *Order-maker made shingles...he was so witty and people liked to listen to him...He died in 1961*. A community watchman called Břenek saw to village security at night; he was there after the Second World War as well.

The established families in Sulkovec and Polom have been represented by names like Šubrt, Krčil, Cibulka, Jílek, Jandl, Gregor, and Ondráček. There are several families named Mareček, Dvořák, and Šimek. Such names can also be found in both lists of village representatives. Each community, both Sulkovec and Polom, had its own respective mayor and communal board. As it is recorded in the school chronicle of Sulkovec, the mayors that are listed there after 1737 and who were appointed by the nobility, had a duty to operate a beer and liquor taproom, for which they were released from compulsory labor. The last mayor in Sulkovec was Vincent Just from No. 2, who at the same time was the first elected mayor of the community after 1849. Many of the names in the official papers repeat; the same families were repeatedly involved in the management of the village. This is evident from the above-mentioned Moravian Address Book, among others records. In 1911, František Cibulka was the mayor of Sulkovec; Josef Šubrt and Alois Jandl were councilors. The community board, established on July 10, 1910, consisted of Josef Kovářík, František Cibulka, Josef Krčil, Josef Nykodým, František Nykodým, Alois Jandl, František Mareček, Josef Šubrt, and Ignát Jílek. Josef Janíček was the parish priest, and the teacher of the community school was Josef Kovářík.

The village of Polom had similar conditions. As is evident from the Moravian Address Book, František Kadlec was the mayor; Štěpán Ondráček, Adolf Vondra, and Čeněk Navrátil were councilors. The community board, established on February 20, 1910, consisted of Josef Janíček, Karel Jančík, František Kadlec, Josef Jíra, and František Maršálek. František Taubr managed the local community school.

Various traveling tradesmen visited Sulkovec and Polom regularly, at certain parts of the year, offering their services and goods. The chronicle of Polom states that vendors dealing in salt, flax seed, and yarn went there. Eyewitnesses remember the especially noteworthy Lazanky lime burners. When they came into the village, they had a special holler: "Lime, beautiful lime". Tinker Krkoška from Slovakia attracted attention to his presence with the rhythmical call "Mending and soldering". Cutlers also visited there and continue to do so to this day. In the period before the Second World War and after it, Romani smiths and boilermakers also used to come: *Gypsies used to steal chickens, or make gimlets. They worked over there, in the meadow behind the potato shed. We always used to watch them.* Many of the traveling tradesmen are long gone, nevertheless, various dealers in textiles still come to Sulkovec and Polom today.

Owners of holiday houses are an inseparable part of the life and image of both villages today. They have bought old cottages, repaired them, and saved them from desolation. They usually come for weekends and holidays. Tourists come to Sulkovec and Polom mostly in the summer months. They follow the path from Dalečín to Bystré, or the green marked path leading through the center of Sulkovec, which was established in 1945.

The people of Sulkovec are generally religious, hardworking, and sober. (This last quality should be considered benevolently, because there is always "one rotten apple which spoils the barrel.") What it could be reproached for is its low level of national awareness and the reluctance towards merriment – true and sober merriment – because as they say, "Positive attitude is half the health". Hard times and hard work can be used as an excuse for not fully embracing merriment. In spite of this record from the Sulkovec chronicle, there have been many jolly people there since times immemorial; people who were fairly popular amongst their neighbors. The above-mentioned František Dvořák, who as also the local policemen, announced the communal resolutions and news from the mayor with witty comments. Eyewitnesses remember other significant figures and characters of the community. One of them was the noted humorist Josef or "Pepek" Krčil, also nicknamed Fridolin – after his own rhyme *I am Fridolin Kukla, whose rear part is split!* (Please note that in the original Kukla's name rhymes with „split“). He entertained not only people from Sulkovec, but from other villages as well. They admired his humorous tales and appropriately called him a funster. Josef Krčil also helped as an organ-player

in the Sulkovec church. On different occasions such as weddings, birthdays, or in the pub, he also played the accordion.