

” L E T U S R E C O N C I L E ” O R A B O U T L O C A L
P U B S A N D E N T E R T A I N M E N T

In predominantly Catholic Sulkovec, Easter has always been the most important holiday of the year. Christmas, when snow covers the beautiful countryside of the Czech Moravian Highlands, is commonly considered to be the most sublime holiday. There is time for it.

Feast is celebrated in Sulkovec on the 16th of October, on Saint Havel’s Day, who is the patron of local church. In the olden days, feast used to be much more colorful; as many of the old folk customs were followed, including the symbolic “chopping of a ram”, which was renown in this area.

When one asks now as to how feast is celebrated now, the answer is: *In fact, it is not celebrated any more.* Nevertheless, many families still prepare festive dinners for themselves and invited relatives, sumptuous meals that include roast duck or goose, baked goods and pastries.

Saint Havel’s Day used to be considered as more or less a landmark day in the yearly life of this agricultural village. The village, the whole area, is renowned for potatoes that are grown plentifully. According to witnesses, the last feast was celebrated about 50 years ago. In nearby villages – for example Nedvězí or Vír, feast is still celebrated, there the tradition continues. Pilgrimage is observed in Sulkovec on the second Sunday in September.

Especially during the first Czechoslovak Republic, the inhabitants of both villages passionately celebrated all public holidays; from the inception of the independent republic, to president Masaryk’s birthday, to devoutly commemorating the fallen soldiers of the First World War. Young men in Polom used to make vows to the Republic, for instance during amateur theatrical performances

Social life in the villages – Sulkovec and Polom - could not be without a variety of entertainment and festivals. In retrospect, it is difficult to believe that according to the old-timers, the folks in the strongly Evangelic Polom, never had much time for entertainment nor *had they even had time for chatting.*

Many balls and dances were organized for the local citizenry, their guests and neighbors from nearby villages. There was a ball, organized by local fire brigade. There was a Neighbors’

Ball, organized by the local inn-keepers, especially by Mr. Šimek, who had at times invited a military band from Brno or other neighboring local brass bands.

A favorite, however, was the Tailors' Ball, an event organized by the local tailors – as there were quite a few of them in the village. There is no evidence as to when this event was first started, but it is known that it was held during the twenties and thirties and that tailors from Sulkovec had invited both their neighbors and non-residents to an event that continued even after the war. After the War, balls and dances were organized by the local *juveniles*, as the members of Czechoslovak later Socialist Union of Youth used to be called. These took place at the local school from 1960s to 1980s.

Josef Krčil, nicknamed Fridolín, used to play in local pub just for fun. According to first hand reports he would play almost unceasingly, but for the moments when he sipped a drink. He was such a good musician that people invited him to play at wedding receptions. There are still good musicians in Sulkovec; František Dvořák and Karel Břenek are among them.

Another popular and eagerly anticipated form entertainment were trips and outings; the folks did not travel to remote resorts, but rather to beautiful locales close to their village, for example to *Paseky* or a place near the local school or that one called traditionally by *the Beech*. The most important component of these trips was the dancing. Out in nature, in the open air, a wooden or concrete dance floor was built, refreshments served -- especially sausages, beer and local hooch. Again, such outings were organized mainly by the local fire brigade and usually held twice during the summer. This nice tradition, favored by the old-timers, has been preserve.

Dating back to the second half of the 19th century, Sulkovec's locals have been putting on theatrical performances. These used to take place in the local pubs, both at U Jílků and at U Šimků, as both these pubs had a stage. These remarkable amateur performances, popular during the Hungarian Monarchy as well as throughout the First Republic, were in the end replaced by other sorts of entertainment.

Stage props were often made by the actors themselves, and sometimes borrowed from their friends – e.g. from Lomnice u Tišnova. Locals still remember performance of the Lantern by Alois Jirásek. Mrs. Anna Jandlová states: *The play was held at U Šimků, such a small stage, well, nothing big. It was about that princess, The Lantern. You know, I saw it on TV, but it was not as*

good as that performance our boys played here. I remember Slávek Dvořák how he played.... and that Šimek – he played the miller.... he was so real. And the water sprites were... so good. And that Růžena, she played that one ... that madcap... she was so good ... she went towards the water sprite... it was... I say, it was not as good on TV as here, at our small stage.

In the 60s, a production of the popular comedy *The Confounded Husband* was put on.

During the First Republic, theatre performances served as fund raisers for the fire brigade. Local amateur actors were unusually active, acting in several performances in one year. For example, in 1929, they entertained their neighbors with plays like *Suffering Leads to Happiness* by František Bnohlák, *Conscience* by Josef Ležák and *Golgota* by Josef Mikšíček.

In Sulkovec as well, the local amateur actors, many of which were also firemen, put on performances for the benefit of the fire brigade. For example in 1922, the national holiday, or The Day of Independence of 28th of October, was honored by a performance of *Vojnarka* by Alois Jirásek; *the moral and tangible result of the performance was considerable*. Everyone enjoyed the performance and the firefighters were glad to have earned 360 crowns. In 1926, a play called *Dora's Death* was performed.

The very first television in Sulkovec, name brand Rubín, was bought by the local People's Committee. As television was considered to be for the collective good, it was placed in so called Youth Club. Collective television watching surely united the local inhabitants; not only young people came to watch it, but elderly too – both men and women. Ice-hockey fans never missed an important game. Figure-skating competitions were favored by local women.

Watching television, which substituted for the showing of films, was not without requisite preparation: *a basket with stove-length logs had to be prepared*. The people from Polom and Sulkovec knew how to entertain themselves at other occasions, too. Among them were various junkets, prepared for a large number of neighbors. Old-timers still speak of harvest festival parties, organized by cooperative farm after the War. Traditionally, Wiener schnitzel and beverages were served.

Nowadays entertainment often consists of drinking and barbecuing. Not only the young, but also the elderly, for example the employees of SULPO, a former cooperative, meet for these occasions, at times organized by the local inn-keeper. Although members of the cooperative

organized this kind of entertainment for the first time in 1999, it could be said that by now it has become a tradition. More than an annual event, this form of entertainment is put on several times a year. In 1999, at least seven pigs were barbecued.

It cannot be overstated that these feast get-togethers contribute to the strengthening of the relationships among the inhabitants of the village and that such costly and demanding events require cooperation and good organization. It is heartwarming that a new tradition is taking root.

sem pokud možno foto pod deštníkem

Inhabitants of Polom and Sulkovec have always worked hard, be it in the fields, on the farms or in the surrounding forests. Well earned rest and relaxation included chatting with neighbors, and for men, gathering with friends for bock. Collective feelings about beer consumption can be gathered from the pages of the fire brigade's chronicle, the one dating back to 1887. In Sulkovec, drinking requisite number of barrels, called affectionately *quart* or *kitten*, was considered manly and was indeed a source of true pride for the local heroes in firemen's uniforms. A leading member of the fire brigade, local teacher Josef Kovářík reported on these endeavors in the chronicle. His amazing narration still delights readers with its novel and picturesque language and good-natured wit. His undisguised passion for the mellow frothy beverage is unmistakable. Pervasive and detailed descriptions of such drinking bouts can be found in the chronicle alongside descriptions of the apparent bravery displayed during fire fighting and on various fire exercises.

Although the chronicle of the fire brigade in Polom, dating back to 1894, is much more toned down, and strictly speaking more sober, its citizens never displayed disdain for good beer. The old-timers recount that until the early 1950's beer was brewed at home and bottled in special bottles with china lids. This was common practice in Sulkovec as well as in many other places. Grapes have never been cultivated in the Czech Moravian Highlands and thus vine was not drunk. Vine was introduced to Sulkovec in the 1930's by Josef Krčil, nicknamed Fridolín, who frequently traveled to the Southern Moravian wine areas, and invariably brought back with him demijohns which he shared with his friends.

While people from Polom brought hooch from Jimramov, folks in Sulkovec used to prepare the so called *firefly* at home. This original spirit was made by mixing water, alcohol and

some sort of an *oil*. Old timers still remember it and say that it looked *like milk*. Good natured inhabitants of Sulkovec enjoyed their locally made drink into the 1950's, and possibly beyond. About the same time, another home made specialty called *vopsíkačka* was frequently consumed. Only 20% alcohol, this beverage was drunk especially while mowing in the fields and considered a necessity.

Local public address system, which was introduced in the village at this time, used to announce its availability. Of course, these announcements were a bit tongue and cheek, as current mayor of the village – František Mareček says: The public addresses would say: *Men will go mowing by scythes to those and those meadows. Everybody is obliged to have a sharpening stone number 10. It meant they were supposed to have ten crowns for the concoction.*

Drinking together not only brought relief from work and necessary rest, but also served as source for many amusing stories, some of which have been recalled ever since. People still remember stories in which they were the butt of the joke as well as those about their local heroes. In the telling of these stories people could give expression to their teasing natures and laugh. Two inseparable friends and who had spent many evenings a week in the local pub are still fondly remembered, as they would go out of their way to find any reason for indulging. For instance, they would drink away their survival of a long, important meeting. Their showy speeches peppered with wit, caused others to remark on their performances: *After a meeting, they had a performance, and both of them were done for.*

The merry nature of many of the local people can be still detected in their witty, humorous and at times wise toasts. For example, Josef Krčil used to say: *Let us reconcile!* (although no arguments were had) or in a sexist way: *Let breasts grow us and women are furious.* While toasting with plum brandy, practical advice was often dispensed: *Hide there quickly, there will be more of them, so that you don't get crushed to death, or enter and do not cause any harm; make space for others.*

The necessity to have a place to meet and spend time together with a beer led to establishing of appropriate facilities – pubs. There was one in Sulkovec in the 19th century, but not much more is known about it. In the 1880s, pub U Šimků was mentioned many times in the fire brigade chronicle: *brave fire fighters got rid of many a "kitten" or "quart" in fire fighters'*

way. According to entries in Chytil's Address Book of Moravia from 1911, there were two pubs in Sulkovec: one of them was run by Jan Šimek, the other by Ignát Jílek, who was also the local weaving agent. Later on, there were still two pubs in Sulkovec. Old-timers call these pubs by names of their former owners, whose families may have run them for several generations. In the middle of the village, there used to be a pub called U Jílků; pub U Šimků used to be closer to road from Nyklovice. The latter was not only a place where locals would gather during the week and on weekends, but it also served as the venue for dances, fire brigade balls and amateur performances. The 1920's and 30's are said to have been the happiest periods.

There was a pub in nearby Polom, too. In the beginning of the 20th century, it belonged to Štěpán Ondráček, who had also flax business. Later it was called U Šimků too. People used to go there to chat over beer and until the 1950's dances and balls were held there as well. Since then people from Polom have to go to Sulkovec to have a beer in a pub. Of all these former pubs, only one remains – the pub U Šimků. The pub in Polom is no longer in operation. Nevertheless, all these former establishments are fondly remembered by their ex-patrons, but perhaps none so, as when Hedvika ruled a pub after her husband's death. This wise woman sometimes poured smaller glasses, or, as we say, *under gauge*, but she did it ostensibly in good faith, explaining: *It's for your own good guys, so that you don't get drunk. I mean well.*

This vigorous woman who served guests from late 1970s until 1991, sometimes until late at night, brought knitting with her. *When Hedvika was here, there was a system. She opened at nine even on weekdays and closed at 1 pm; then she opened again in the evening.* During those times, the pub was not only a place where people met over a beer or organized dances and balls, but there used to be a *hall of traditions*, decorated by outstanding photographs of the Highlands. When Hedvika left, Miroslav Šimek took over; and patrons from Sulkovec affixed a new shingle with the following eloquent inscription "Hostinec u Pintrády". He earned this nickname, for he often addressed his guests with that saying.

The current owner Pavel Fikes opens only on weekends and this creates a bit of a problem. It is at the local grocery store where one can get the necessary "pick-me-up", where one can raise a glass, sometimes poetically nicknamed *morning dew* or *dog's yap*. Others buy plum brandy in Kunštát, made in the local Chalupník's Distillery.

The main aim is not the purchase of spirits, but rather meeting friends and chatting with them. The local sporadically open pub does not serve this purpose well. While people in Polom sometimes cracked a barrel in the local “refreshing room”, which they had established in the fire-brigade armory, men’s club from Sulkovec, headed by Emil Břenek, found homely and hospitable shelter in an old wooden *cabin* in the middle of the village, humorously nicknamed *The Base*. There is nothing new about meeting in a place like this. In the 1920’s and 30’s a grocery store existed, a place local people called it U Martenzů. Farmers from Sulkovec often met there on Sunday mornings when heading back home from church. Brandy and plum brandy were served and sold, so the people came to call it *baby tap-room*.

The tradition of meeting early evening on Saturdays and after mass on Sunday mornings continues in Sulkovec. People meet to chat, perhaps to reminisce about the good old days, perhaps to discuss the current events in this part of the Highlands. The fact that the mayor of Sulkovec František Mareček likes coming there to chat renders these meetings more important.

It is necessary to note that the authors of this book appreciate the accommodating atmosphere of *The Base*; much has been learned there about life in Sulkovec and Polom.