

A Century of Koláče on the “Avenue”

The historic building that houses Sykora Bakery was built in 1900, during the era of dirt streets, wooden sidewalks, and horse-drawn delivery wagons. Its first tenant was a saloon named Dew Drop Inn. The large limestone steps in front of the main doorway cover a onetime open stairway that led to a basement barbershop. Hair cuts were a quarter.

Charles and Anna Kosek opened the first Bohemian bakery here in 1903. The family moved temporarily to Arkansas in 1912, but retained ownership of the building while several others operated a bakery under various titles for more than fifteen years.

Joseph Sykora had worked for the Koseks and in 1927, purchased the building and alongside his wife Clara owned and operated Sykora Bakery for nearly forty years.

The building has undergone many changes over the years, including four additions. From 1921 to 1934, the one story section was the west-side branch of the Cedar Rapids Public Library.

Our Hubbard Oven (1893 patent, installed in the 1920s) was the heart and soul of the bakery for more than eighty years. In June of 2008, the oven was forced into retirement by the historic flood. It was once again returned to service in June of 2010, this time as an educational centerpiece positioned under another long-time bakery icon.

In 1930, during the Great Depression, Clint Kalous painted the bakery building in return for bread. An accomplished artist, Kalous left his permanent mark on the bakery by painting a scene which depicts a green countryside with a sign pointing the way to Sykora's. The painting also portrays bee hives, a reminder to us today, that Joseph Sykora kept bees and harvested his own baker's honey.

After Joseph's death in 1966, son Lumir Sykora, and later, son Lester Sykora owned and operated the bakery until 1994, when it was purchased by Don and Sheila Janda.

John and Sue Rocarek purchased Sykora Bakery in September, 2001, and operated it until November, 2006, when they closed it for major structural repairs.

The flood of '08, created many changes as well as opportunities for the century-old bakery. Eight and a half feet of the Red Cedar River made it to within three inches under the Kalous painting. Equipment replacement was difficult. Sykora Bakery moved into the 20th Century with the addition of the 1947 vintage Despatch Best Boy Oven. 332 volunteers from across the country contributed over 2,500 hours to restore the bakery after the disaster. Iowa Governor Chet Culver presided over the ceremony, helping to celebrate the reopening of Sykora Bakery in April, 2009.

Each year, we host the Sykora Bakery Cabbage Roll Relay Race during Houby Days, and Svejek Fest, the Saturday before Labor Day.

Shortly after reopening, the bakery added the lower level gift store, the outdoor cafe, and later, the free outdoor art exhibit. In September, 2016, the "little bakery on the Avenue" entered into a new phase in its century-plus history by adding a full Czech, Moravian and Slovak restaurant menu.

We are extremely proud to be a part of our community's cultural heritage district. Please help our little village to grow by visiting often and sharing your experience with friends, relatives and neighbors. Like us on Facebook and join us in celebrating an "Old World" heritage.