



In this Czech Village photo from 1910, horses and horseless carriages share the road that is divided by trolley car tracks. The old 16th Ave. Bridge is in the background, and today's Czech Cottage is the building on the far left, in the foreground.

The original Bohemian settlers came to live in Linn County as early as 1854. When coming to Cedar Rapids, they first settled in the districts on the east side of the river known as "Oak Hill" and the "Flats."

Many generations of the first Bohemians worked at the "Packin' House" – T. M. Sinclair & Co., later known as Wilson Foods, then Farmstead Foods; the "Starch Works" - Penick & Ford, now known as Ingredion, Inc.; and the "Cereal Mill" or "Quaker" as Quaker Oats was/is often called.

An Irishman is credited for Cedar Rapids' large Czech population. Thomas Sinclair opened T.M. Sinclair & Co., on the city's southeast side, in November of 1871. He hired some of the first Bohemians in the area, and found their work ethic second to none. Sinclair encouraged his new industrious employees to contact family and friends back home in Bohemia and let them know they had a job waiting for them in Cedar Rapids. Many villages in Bohemia saw family after family leave "the old country" for America.

At the beginning of the last century, the Bohemians began migrating to the city's west side. The word "Bohemian" fell out of favor over the years. It was often replaced with the derogatory "Boheemee" or "Bohunk." Then adding to the stigma was the use of the word "bohemian" spelled with a small "b" to describe a wanderer, vagabond, or even worse – gypsy.

In 1918, Czechoslovakia was formed by combining the provinces of Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia. Communist rule slowly dissolved with the Velvet Revolution in 1989, and in 1993, the countries peacefully split, with the Moravians and the Bohemians making the newly formed Czech Republic and the Slovaks forming their own Slovak Republic.

Now, New Bohemia is reborn on the east side, as the original Bohemian business district is being revitalized. The Czech Village/New Bo area is a fast growing mixture of shops and businesses intent on preserving this fascinating old world heritage, and is a proud Main Street Community.