

# History of Marak

*Taken from "Our Heritage - 1939"*

by Mrs. August (Mary) Hubnik

This was written in 1939, so since then many things have changed. The thing to keep in mind when reading the translation is that there were no gravel roads, no cars, no electricity and no other conveniences, yet the people were so enthusiastic about worshipping and attending church services.

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Marak is a small Czech parish about 8 miles from the County seat of Milam County, Cameron, Texas. The community is good black farming land, where the main crop grown is cotton.

In the center of this community, surrounded by beautiful shade trees, stands a Czech Catholic church, Sts. Cyril and Methodius. The parish acquired the name from a family named Marak. In 1881 a Catholic family named Frank Marak moved here from Dubina and bought several hundred acres of pastureland. This took a long time and hard work before the land was cleared of brush and prepared for farming. Today, this is some of the most productive land in this central Texas area. After some years Mr. Frank Marak and his family moved to Hill County, but three of his sons stayed here, married and raised their families. During Frank Marak's stay here and before he moved to Hill County, he donated 1 acre of land for a Cemetery (the old cemetery) where the Catholic people could be buried. Later, the cemetery board agreed to let non-catholics be buried there also. In the first years of the Marak families living here, there were only a few other families here but more and more began to move in as time went on. The rich fertile farming land beckoned more Czech and also German immigrants.

Later a Catholic church was built in Cameron, where only occasionally a priest would come to say mass, and this was in the German language as there were few Czech priests. As more settlers came to Marak, the people wished to have a church and a Czech priest. They took their wish and went to Bishop N.A. Gallagher, asking if they could build a church. Bishop Gallagher gladly consented to their wish. Next was the decision where to build the church. At that time there were very bad roads and they wanted to please everyone so that no one would have any great distance to travel to church. (Remember, this was on foot, horseback or wagon, on dirt muddy roads). Soon the people decided (after considering several locations) to build the church in its present location.

On September 20, 1903 a meeting was held to decide on the building of the church and on November 1, 1903, John Matulik was appointed as contractor to build the church. A kind lady, Barbara Kubecka (Eleanora Tomek's grandmother) donated 2 acres of land and the parishioners bought 3 additional acres and on November 26, 1903 the cornerstone was laid for the building of a new Czech Catholic church. The dimensions of the church were to be 60 feet by 32 feet with a steeple of 32 feet high. At that time the parishioners never gave it a thought that the parish would some day have their own resident priest. Their humble wish was that occasionally they would ask a priest to come and say mass, hear confessions, baptize and bless the people. The building of the church progressed rapidly, (all who were able helped) and also a young parishioner, Matej Sevcik (my daddy) built the first altar, which was very beautifully done.

When the urge to have a church of their own, an urge that was like a thirst that had to be satisfied, the Bishop asked Father K. Kacer to look into the possibility of building a church. That time Father Kacer was pastor of Frenstat in Burleson County, and once a month he would ride horseback to Cyclone to have mass. After the church at Marak was completed, Father Kacer would stop at Marak once a month on a week day, possibly on a Monday, on his way back to Frenstat, to have mass in the new Marak church. The first Mass in the church was on April 18, 1904. Many people came to attend the first mass and rejoiced that at last they have their own place of worship and can pray and sing in their own native tongue, the Czech language. This, having mass once a month on a week day lasted a year. The people were not satisfied with having mass only once a month, so they sent a request to Bishop Gallagher asking him if Father Kacer could be their resident, that they would immediately build a rectory. Bishop complied with their wishes, stating that Cyclone would be his mission parish and that Marak would have a resident priest. The parish house was built and on December 31, 1904, Father Kacer came to Marak as a resident priest. On January 1, 1905, he had mass for the first time in his so called "home parish".

When Father Kacer came to Marak, the parish consisted of 43 families. Soon the church became too small, because at this time it was a big boom of immigrants coming into Texas. Therefore, the church was enlarged by 20 feet, with sacristies. In the year 1913 the rectory was enlarged by 3 bedrooms. At that time if any visiting priests came, or to hear Easter confessions, they all had to spend the nights here. Travel was by buggy or some people traveled by wagon.

The parish organized St. Joseph's Society, (similar to the Altar Society) but it did not prosper and soon disbanded. Also, St. Ann's Altar Society was organized. In 1904 - K.J.T and in 1907 - K.J.Z.T. were organized and to this day are progressing well.

The organizations had no place to hold their meetings, so in 1909 the parishioners built a hall —44 feet by 22 feet, with folding doors to have meetings, programs, and other entertainment. Carpenters for this building were (free) Matej Sevcik, Joe Tomek, Sr. and Joe Tomek, Jr. Many parishioners donated money and so the building was immediately paid for. In two years at the request of Ludwig Mokry, a stage and 2 dressing rooms were added to the hall. The building now was in the form of a T. All expenses with the enlarging of the hall were immediately paid for.

The parishioners also wanted a new cemetery, so, a good parishioner, John Gurecky donated 2 acres of land for a new resting place for the faithful departed. This was a generous gift and a great sacrifice of Mr. Gurecky, as he had only a very small farm that had not been paid for. Mr. Gurecky also donated a huge tree, from which Matej Sevcik and the Tomek's made a big cross for the cemetery. Father Kacer ordered the body of Christ from Tyrot, Italy and this was put on the cross. The statue of the body of Christ soon cracked, so then another good parishioner, John Vansa donated another cross for the cemetery, in the amount of \$100.00.

The parishioners now turned their wishes into the possibility of a Catholic school. So on May 10, 1925 a committee was formed for the purpose of the building of the school. The committee consisted of John Gurecky, Julius Janicek, Louis Tepera, Frank Zarosky, George Matuia, Kaspar Lazek and Joe Slavik. The school building was to be 70 feet by 44 feet with 2 class rooms and a stage and auditorium for programs and plays. The cost of the building was \$6,800.00. In the fall (September) of 1925 Sister M. Dominika and Sister M. Benedikta were the first teachers. Will and

Augustina Kostroun (Eleanora Tomek's parents) had donated an acre of land for the building and playground. Since we now had a school and teaching Sisters from the Mother House in Shiner, it was a must to furnish living quarters for the Sisters. The hall that had been built in 1909 was now remodeled and furnished as a home for the Sisters. The remodeling, furniture and all expense was \$1,730.00. Since that time many Sisters have taught here. Some of the present parishioners surely remember their teachers, Sisters of the Incarnate Word Blessed Sacrament.

During the establishment of the parish, many beautiful and worthy celebrations had taken place. First of these celebrations was the blessing of the church on May 17, 1905. Bishop Gallagher blessed the church and also administered Confirmation upon 63 parishioners. On November 29, 1906, the side altars were blessed.

The cemetery was also blessed. A most memorable occasion for the parish was the ordination of one of the parish young men for the priesthood. Father Joe Hanak, son of Ignac and Frances Hanak had his first mass on June 22, 1915. More than 20 priests and several thousand people attended the celebration. On October 7, 1926, the Catholic school was blessed by Bishop Byrne. On December 2, 1919, the parish celebrated the Silver Anniversary of priesthood of Father Kacer.

The church is beautifully painted, the cost of the interior painting being \$1,000.00. Two bells were donated by George and Thomas Marak. The beautiful main altar cost \$1,200.00 and many parishioners contributed to the payment of the altar. \$500.00 was collected to buy 2 beautiful candelabras.

The parish is totally Czech. The singing is in Czech and is conducted by Miss Theresa Picha, who for 30 years has been organist and choir director.

Czech plays are performed by many of the young married couples. The English and also the Czech language is taught in school. In 1936 electricity was installed in all the parish buildings.