

Our History: Arch Creek

AMERICAN CZECH-SLOVAK CULTURAL CLUB

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BBT Contributing Writer



A secluded library in the loft served as a bordello for soldiers during WWII, according to Karl Kmoch, the club's vice-president.

"When I sell liquor, it's called bootlegging. When my patrons serve it on silver trays on Lake Shore Drive, it's called hospitality."

Al Capone said that back in the 1920s, and little did he know that one of his bootlegging sites would someday become hospitable. The place in question is the American Czech-Slovak Cultural Club, located at 13325 Arch Creek Rd. Although the connection between the ACSCC and Capone is somewhat tenuous, the bits of factual history that remain in support of the theory are preserved by the club's current members.

The legend goes that during the 1920s and '30s this location served as a busy smuggling spot for Capone and his Chicago friends.

"What do you need for bootlegging?" said Alan Sokol, of the Greater North Miami

Historic Society, who has researched the story. "Water to get liquor in, road and railroad to get it out. This place had it all."

The club sits in the middle of the Arch Creek historic area, where, in 1856, the Army cut a military trail to connect Fort Lauderdale to Miami. Some 40 years later a railroad was built directly through the ACSCC property.

According to Sokol, FBI files from 1930 traced Chicago booze to Miami. After

WHEN YOU GO

**American Czech-Slovak
Cultural Club**

13325 Arch Creek Rd.

North Miami, FL 33181

www.ACSCC.org

Closed July & August

Capone ended up in jail on tax evasion charges, records from 1934 confirm that somebody paid Capone's taxes by selling a property in the Arch Creek area. The name and the exact address of the property, however, cannot be determined. But a detailed description of the house, a smaller building and a barn match the site at 13325 Arch Creek Road. At the time, the property was owned by John. T. Larkin, who lived on N.E. 81st Street, where, as rumor has it, Capone also owned a house.

"Capone ran his whole business through third parties," said Sokol. "It shouldn't come as a surprise that the property actually belonged to him and not to Larkin as cited on the deed."

In 1949, 77 Czechoslovak immigrants purchased land in the Arch Creek area -land with a single-family home, one smaller building and a barn. But Sokol is cautious not to jump to conclusions. Within three to six months, he will finish his investigation and present the findings at ACSCC.

"I've been working on this for almost a year," he said. "I'm trying to pinpoint it directly to this address, but, honestly I haven't gotten that far."

The nearby trail and railroad attracted many Czechoslovak immigrants from Chicago, not just Capone and his cronies. Compared with the brutality of working in a northern U.S. mine, living on fertile land in a warm climate seemed like a dream to many immigrants.

"There were three great waves of immigration of Czechoslovaks to the U.S.," said Dr. Robert Petrik, honorary consul of the Slovak Republic, "In 1948, when communists took over the country, in 1968, when Russian and Warsaw Pact troops

invaded Czechoslovakia, and then in 1990s, when a lot of young people, especially from the Czech Republic, came here."

According to the 2000 census, there were nearly 97,000 people of Czech and Slovak descent living in Florida. Early immigrants gathered at local parks and beaches until a group of 20 decided to form a club at the Slavia Inn, in Miami Springs. When the tavern became too small to accommodate the increasing number of members, they decided to purchase the current site of ACSCC. Marie Kosan was a child during the society's formative years. She remembers the 1950s, when she used to run around the main building with other children.

"The club was open four days a week," said Kosan. "It was a favorite place for many Czechoslovak families. It used to be so

packed that you had to wait for an hour to be seated."

Today, the club is open to the public on Saturday and Sunday, and closed for July and August. According to Karl Kmoch, the club's vice-president, their revenue comes mainly from an extensive cultural program, as well as from the leasing fees for

special events. In addition, Sunday dinner, prepared by Miroslav Dusek, the club's co-president and an experienced German, Hungarian and Czechoslovak chef, adds some money to a lean budget. Occasionally, the society receives a City of North Miami grant in recognition of its historic importance, but that is still not enough to effectively maintain the property.

Kmoch is looking forward to the conclusion of Sokol's research, which might shed some media light on the club itself. In the meantime, he adds one more bit of gossip to their 3.3-acre landscape.

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*Alan Sokol,
Greater North Miami Historic Society*

"I'm not sure about Capone, but during WWII, this was a bordello for the army servicemen," said Kmoch. "Rooms on the second floor had numbers and big red beds when we first bought it. That is a fact."

Today there is a library upstairs, perhaps a symbolic renovation after years of vice-

women and (possible) gangster operations left their mark. The structure, native art pieces, cultural programs and meals served at the ACSCC reflect a rich Czech-Slovak history that will hopefully continue for years to come

BBT.



Above: Vitamevas – Welcome to the ACSCC!
Right: American and Czech-Slovak U.S. Presidents reflect the members' pride in their dual heritage.

