



THE STODOLKA FAMILY

by Mike Stodolka <mstodolka@msn.com>



Growing up in St. Paul, Minnesota, I heard many intriguing stories about the Stodolka families from central Minnesota. These stories compelled me to document them in some manner. I acquired the Family Tree Maker software and began to record their names and their relationships to each other. Around 1990, I officially began to research my branch, and record as much Stodolka history as possible. My family tree information was compiled from several resources. Many thanks go to the various contributors. A special tribute goes to Gerald Sauer, Bob Prokott, Barb Dolny, and the Polish Genealogy Society of Minnesota (PGS-MN) for their contributions.

The Stodolka family name originated, as far as my records tell, somewhere in the vicinity of Lower Silesia around 1700. Polish records prior to 1700 were either destroyed on purpose or due to wars or are being held for money or political reasons. Even so, the existing records are quite accurate. This was true in the Polish province of Opole in Lower Silesia. The Hitler regime apparently kept very accurate records regarding family's history. There is an area of Lower Silesia where many Stodolka family records were found. This is where my branch was gathered around 1700.

The Stodolka name, written Stodolka in Polish, means a "small-barn." It is the diminutive form of *stodoła*, the Polish word for a standard-sized barn regularly used for livestock or storage. In Polish, our last name is pronounced "sta-DOUW-ka" because the *ł* sounds much like our *w*. Here in America, we pronounce the name "stud-DOLL-ka."

Figure 1 – This map shows part of the German Province of Silesia as it existed in 1905. This is a modified version of a map shown on the Wikipedia page <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Silesia>, which the author, Qqerim, made available via a Creative Commons license. Administrative centers are shown with their German names and the Polish equivalents in parentheses. The author's family came from the east central region of this map, north of Oppeln (Opole), south of Namslau (Namysłów), and east-northeast of Brieg (Brzeg).

Using various resources, I have researched the Stodolka name as information became available. I got started using information from a PGS-MN member, Bob Prokott, a director with the PGS-MN. I also researched the LDS church records I requested from the Minnesota Historical Society reference room. This was not an everyday practice but, this type of work never ends as more data surfaces. Using applications such as Family Search, Ancestry, and Find a Grave, I was able to compile much information.

Both agreed that the origin of the name came from a small area in southern Poland. This section of Lower Silesia lies north of the city of Opole, south of Namysłów, and east-northeast of Brzeg. St.





Figure 2 – Maria Rozczyk Stodolka at age 90. All photographs appear courtesy of the author.

Stanisław Kostka parish church in the village of Falkowice, Poland possesses a large number of baptismal, wedding, and death records that include the Stodolka surname. Other localities listed in these records are

Dammratch [German name of Domaradz], Zieleniec, Dąbrówka Dolna, Lubnów, and Zawisć, which are all nearby villages. Kraków is about one hundred miles east of this area.

It was from the Lower Silesia area around the mid to late 1870s that the Stodolkas began to immigrate to America. Due to poor farming conditions, political oppression from the German chancellor, Bismarck, and the size of family, they fled to Hamburg and set sail for America.

My Family

A record from St. Stanisław Kostka parish church in Falkowice revealed that Piotr Stodolka married Maria Rozczyk in June of 1866. They had a son, Peter, born in that same year. Piotr and Maria immigrated to New York via Hamburg, Germany aboard the ship *Allemania* in 1872. They arrived along with their six-year-old son, Peter John Stodolka.

It has been said that immigrants like Piotr and Maria arrived in New York, and many traveled by train to St. Cloud in central Minnesota. From there, they went by oxcarts northward to homestead virgin soil. These Polish immigrants were labeled “Polanders” (reference PGS-MN article, “Polanders to America” by Bob Prokott). Immigration records show they entered several

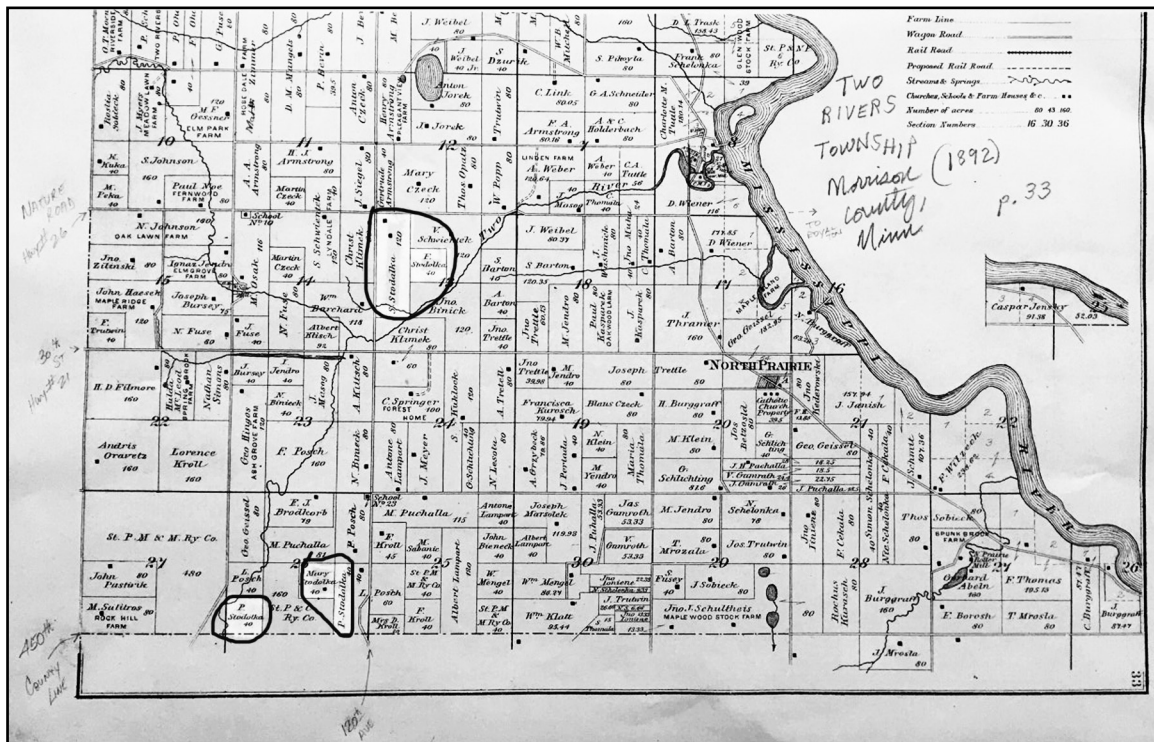


Figure 3 – 1892 Stearns County plat map, with Stodolka properties circled.



Figure 4 – The early Stodolkas: Ed, Eliz, Frances, Agnes, Peter, John, Nick Karish, Cyril, and Martha.

different titles such as Poland, Germany, Prussia, and Silesia as their native land. Many of the Stodolkas entered their occupation as *Häusler* or *Angler Hausler*. From my research, this means farmer or keeper of a house. [Editor – The usual definition of *Häusler* was a peasant who had a small house or cottage, but no land.]

The Stearns County Museum's 1892 plat map (see Figure 3) indicates that Piotr and Maria Stodolka homesteaded forty acres of farmland southwest of North Prairie, on the border between Morrison and Stearns counties. It appears that they purchased the land from the St. Paul and Chicago Railroad Company. Piotr's brother, Syzmon [sic, Szymon], also homesteaded land nearby in 1892 that later became the town of Bowlus. The Stodolka name is on the stained-glass window in the rear of St. Stanislaus Kostka church in Bowlus. It is one of the founding families of that church. Later plat maps show other Stodolkas with homesteaded farmland near the towns of Royalton, Bowlus, and Perham in Stearns, Morrison, and Benton Counties in central Minnesota. Many Stodolkas can be found buried in the cemeteries of Bowlus, Royalton, and North Prairie.

Piotr Stodolka was one of nine children born to Johann and Margaritha (Sobeck) Stodolka. If or when any of his siblings immigrated to America is unclear. Local records show Piotr and Maria to have had eight children after settling in Morrison County. They

may have lost other children before leaving Silesia. They are documented as purchasing land along the border of the Stearns and Morrison County line. The Morrison County Plat map of Two Rivers Township shows a P. Stodolka homesteaded with forty acres of land about two miles south of what is

now the town of Bowlus, Minnesota. Piotr and Mary both had their names on two adjoining parcels of land there. Piotr's brother, Syzmon T. Stodolka is shown to have land just east of Piotr and Maria.

An article (in the *Royalton Banner*) explains that on May 2, 1883, Piotr was killed in a nearby horse-related accident. The article reports Piotr leaving North Prairie by horseback, to return home after a day in town. While riding out of town on two horses, Piotr, who was inebriated, fell off and hit his head on a rock. Later, at the Schlichting farm, Piotr's horses were found. Mr. Schlichting went searching for Piotr and found him on the trail, blood protruding from his head. They arrived in town too late to save him. Piotr is buried in the North Prairie cemetery.



Figure 5 – First immigrants Syzmon Stodolka and family – with Frank and wife Julia Klimek(?).



Figure 6 – Peter, Martha & Matilda

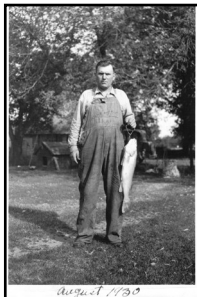
Piotr and Maria's oldest child, Peter John, married Franciska Wilczek in 1887. It is said that Peter John courted his wife to be in downtown Royalton. Peter had a habit of using the trains that ran through Royalton as a taxi service. He would jump aboard and pull the hand break to stop the train where he wanted to get off. He usually walked to town, but rode the train back to his farm. Peter's farm was halfway between Royalton and Rice, Minnesota. Railroad marshals were later brought in to quell this devious activity.

Peter and Franciska Wilczek Stodolka eventually moved to another farm about two miles southeast of Royalton. It was said they moved so as to be

closer to a forested area and a wood source. This Stodolka farm was about two miles southeast of Royalton just off what is 155th Street. Simon Popp resides there now. A brick house was built on this 330-acre farm in 1906.

Peter and Franciska raised five children on this farm: John, Cyril, Ed, Matilda, and Martha. The kids were known to play on the windmill in the front yard by grabbing a vane and spinning around as the wind took them. (Some say only when the parents were not home.) The Stodolkas were prosperous potato farmers here. The sandy soil was conducive for potatoes to flourish.

Peter John was a popular fellow. He was on several committees in the area. He was age 54 and weighed approximately three hundred pounds at the time of his death



Figures 8a, b, c, d – John; John; the “William Crooks”; Agnes Karasch

from natural causes in December of 1920. Franciska reportedly came to America at age sixteen and worked as a cook in the North Prairie hotel before she was married.

John Paul Stodolka left the family farm at age sixteen to work on the Great Northern Railroad in St. Paul, Minnesota. All of his siblings remained in the Royalton area.

Peter's son, John, my grandfather, was said to have built a spiral staircase within

the home while he was in his teens. John became an Engineer for the Great Northern Railway. John was a successful man. He worked

his way up the ladder from coal stoker to engineer. Eventually he had enough seniority to drive the “William Crooks,” which was a popular custom-made locomotive used for special events. It now resides in the Duluth Railroad Museum.

In 1918, John married Agnes Karasch, who also grew up on a farm near Royalton. He met her when she was working as a cook at a St. Cloud hotel. The Karasch farm was two miles southwest of Royalton along the banks of the Mississippi River on prime real estate. After all of the Karasch family members moved away from the farm, John was given power of attorney and took possession of it. John quickly sold the farm. John was a about six feet tall and weighed about 235 pounds. John died at age 57 while on a layover in Breckenridge, MN.



Figure 7 – Peter & Frances Stodolka family



Figure 9 – Cyril during World War I

Once more using his craftsmanship, he built a wooden boat and used one of the first outboard motors with it to satisfy his fishing interest. John and Agnes had one child, James Peter Stodolka, who was born on December 5, 1920. Jim grew up in St. Paul but he spent most of his summers and spare time in the Royalton area.

Cyril

John's brothers, Cyril and Ed Stodolka, after serving in the First World War, became interested in machinery. They really were interested in aviation. In 1916, Ed built an airplane that crashed in its first flight. Cyril then purchased a biplane in Chicago and transported it to the Royalton area in 1918. Cyril says they flew without licenses. Cyril took his wife-to-be, Tracy, for rides in this plane. He even proposed to her, saying, "If you say no, I'll dump you out."

The barnstorming era lasted from 1919 to 1924. Along with their cousin Tony Kalis, the Stodolka brothers barnstormed and put on air shows for the locals. Many people had never seen a plane before. One time Cyril landed at a crude airstrip and a farm



Figure 10 – Curtis Standard "Jenny" biplane

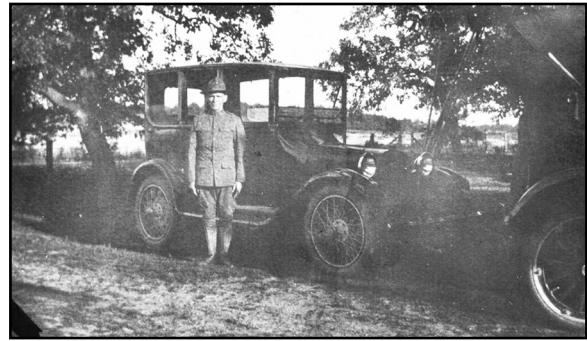


Figure 11 – Cyril with "Ambulance"

girl remarked that Cyril looked "normal." She thought he could be an alien!

Cyril gave many people rides and the passengers had to pay for the gas. Cyril was the pilot, Ed the mechanic, and Tony was a wing-walker and parachutist. After flying with no parachutes, they began to fold their own. They said they did not trust anyone else to pack a chute because of static electricity problems. They had to put newspaper in between the folds. These daredevils would crawl out onto the wing and then somehow down to the plane's axle to jump off! Their rip cord was fastened to the fuselage. This all happened before 1920!

Cyril took his wife-to-be, Tracy, for rides in this plane. He even proposed to her, saying, "If you say no, I'll dump you out."

Cyril gave up flying up in 1924 after surviving two crashes. Cyril said the average life of a pilot in World War I was 35 days. He had enough.

These brothers were admired by many and especially by a young man who lived near Little Falls by the name of Charles Lindbergh. Gerald Sauer reports that the Stodolkas showed Charles how to fly their plane. Around 1919, a young Charles Lindbergh would ride a motor bike down to the Stodolkas airstrip, which was built by the Stodolkas just west of the town of Royalton. Cyril says Charles was a very quiet young man. Cyril is both mentioned and pictured in the Charles Lindbergh Museum in Little Falls.

More on Cyril and his pioneering days of aviation can be heard during an audio taped interview by author, Bruce Larson, who was writing a book about the Charles Lindbergh story. This interview with Cyril

focuses on the famous transatlantic flight, but includes stories about the early days of Royalton. Cyril said Charles asked him about different plane engines and how to calculate fuel consumption. Cyril also gave Charles information on how to use trade winds to his benefit. There is an effort to have Cyril Ludwig Stodolka inducted into the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fall. The next induction is in 2022.

Cyril was also one of the few to have a car in the early days of Royalton. He had a large Maxwell with four bucket seats, big wheels, and high chassis clearance. Cyril was asked by Dr. Watson, the town doctor, to help transport the injured and make house calls with him during bad weather. There are many stories about Cyril and his makeshift ambulance service.

Cyril was also a business entrepreneur. He began to transport crude oil from Iowa to central Minnesota. In 1915, he bought and operated the Roy Dragoo's service station in Royalton. Cyril later diversified into the road construction business. C.L. Stodolka Road Construction Company paved and maintained most of the roads in Minnesota north of St. Cloud. The business is now Tri-City Cement in Little Falls and is run by Ed Stodolka's grandson, Jack Surma. In 1938, Cyril also used his abilities to lobby in the Minnesota state Legislature on union scale wages for construction workers.

Cyril also helped build the Fairbanks-Morris power plant. This was at the Blanchard Dam near Royalton. Federal engineers came to design plans for it and Cyril got involved. He helped get cement and electricity from Royalton to the construction site. He read manuals on generators for seven weeks and helped the federal agents hook it up. Cyril claims he had a natural ability for electricity.

Edward

Ed was a renowned mechanic, and after a few attempts with aviation (including an attempt at a homebuilt helicopter that is in the Royalton Museum), he stayed with the gas station in Royalton. Ed built a car out of

parts from several types of vehicles. His sister drove that car for several years! Both Ed and Cyril married Baron sisters. Cyril married Tracy Baron and Ed married Elizabeth Baron. Ed had two daughters and Cyril had no children. Ed was said to have accidentally cut off a finger in his youth. His niece, Mary Ann, reports he actually reattached it himself! Believe it or not, after a month or so of pain, it grew back.



Figures 13a, b, and c – Martin & Matilda; Martha; Frank and Martha

Matilda and Martha

Matilda married Martin Sauer. Martin had many jobs and worked for a while with her husband in the Dakotas in the grain mill industry. Martha married Frank Posterick. She was the post office clerk in Royalton for many years.

James Peter and Phyllis Stodolka

My father, Jim Stodolka, was the only son of John and Agnes. He married Phyllis Collins, another only child from the midway area. Together, they grew up two blocks from each other in the midway district of St. Paul. Jim graduated from the University of Minnesota with an electrical engineering degree, and in October of 1944 they were married in St. Columba's church in St.



Figure 12 – Ed and Elizabeth Baron



Figure 14 – Phyllis and Jim Stodolka

Paul. Jim enlisted in World War II and was signed to flight instruction school for the AT-6 trainer and the B-25 Mitchell bomber in Enid, Oklahoma. He spent the entire war in Enid. He said his claim to fame was "there were no enemy planes that ever crossed over Oklahoma!"

When the war was over, Jim worked in construction briefly for C.L. Stodolka Construction in Little Falls before returning to St. Paul. Jim claimed his allergies were an issue in construction. However, many believe he didn't want to be involved with a family-owned business.

He and Cyril engineered actually invented a sand spreader for roads that was later aced out by a large manufacture for patent rights. Jim moved on to the Twin Cities and worked in the insurance business. He eventually managed his own company, the Lakeland Fire and Casualty Company. After many successful years, he had to dissolve the company when financial supporters, including Warren Buffet, withdrew funds from the company. From there he worked for the State of Minnesota rating and information bureau.

Jim and Phyllis raised two children, John and Michael. There was first a daughter born in 1947 to Jim and Phyllis. Her name was Joanne Marie and she had a congenital heart deformity and only lived 11 days. She is buried in Sunset Memorial cemetery in St. Anthony, MN. John was born a year later; he is now married to Colleen Pieckert and they have four children, Anne, Paul, and the twins, Jake and Maren. John owns the Pollution Control Auto Parts company with his son Paul.

Michael (yours truly) is married to Ann McQuillan. They have four children, Amy, Cari Jimmy and JoAnn Marie. I worked for the City of St. Paul's Parks and Recreation Division for eight years and the Public Works Traffic Operations Department, in

the signal timing section for 31 years. I retired on November 12, 2013.

Mike and Ann's daughter, Amy, is married to Nick Bitzan and they have two boys, Willy and Ben. They live on Goose Lake near Harris, MN. Cari is a travel nurse at this time and resides in Corpus Christi, TX. Jimmy is married to Taylor Byrd, works for Medtronic, and they reside in Kansas City, KS. JoAnn is a student at Cretin-Derham Hall at this time.

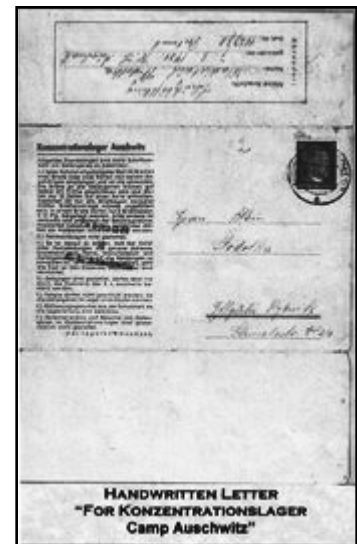


Figure 17 – The handwritten letter from Auschwitz

Noted Stodolkas

Around 1995, through an art dealer in New York (who had just acquired a laminated document at an art auction in Manhattan), I was fortunate enough to acquire a 1944 handwritten letter written by twenty-one-year-old Władysław Stodolka. It was addressed to his father, Albin Stodolka, in Rybnik, Poland. Rybnik is in southern Poland and was historically famous for its Nazis resistance. Albin Stodolka has been found to be listed as an officer in the Polish underground resistance army.

The letter is directed to his mother and is actually quite upbeat about the



Figure 15 – The family of Albin Stodolka



Figure 16 – The family of Władysław



Figure 18 – The grave of Władysław Stodolka in Rybnik

living conditions at Auschwitz. In the letter, Władysław mentions he is happy like a “fish.” We believe these are code words inserted to mean just the contrary—he most likely hated fish. Władysław was then transferred in 1943 to Torgau, Germany. This was another concentration camp designated for underground resistance interrogations. He was liberated from Torgau. My theory is the Germans wanted to get Albin but nabbed his son, Władysław, for information.

Other researched records also show there were at least two Stodolkas, Władysław and Andreas, who were imprisoned at Oświęcim (Auschwitz) during World War II. Andreas did not survive the concentration camp. Władysław survived and was liberated from Torgau. He died at age 59 in Rybnik, Poland.

In 2005, I wanted to find out more of the possible connection of Władysław and my branch of the Stodolkas. He has our last name, comes from the same province of Poland, and has some visual similarities to the Stodolkas. So, via a Polish online chat forum, I connected with a lady named Lucyna Maciejonczyk in Rybnik, Poland. Through her help, we found the widow of Władysław. Hedwiga Stodółka, Władysław's wife, lived in an apartment in Rybnik! How fascinating! Lucyna met with her and sent me the photos of Władysław I now have.

In 2011, my son Jimmy, was living in London as an exchange student through St. John's University in Collegeville, MN. In May when he finished, I hooked up with him and together we traveled to Katowice, Poland to meet with the Maciejonczyk family in nearby Rybnik. Lucyna and her family demanded we stay at their house for five days. They took us to Kraków, Oświęcim, Falkowice, and Rybnik to see the grave of Władysław (see Figure 18). It was a marvelous five-day stay with them, to say the least. I am still in contact with them today.

Everyone is interesting in their own way. I am sure there are more interesting Stodolkas that I have yet to hear about but, through my research I have discovered that there are many noteworthy Stodolkas living today. Mike Stodolka, a left-handed baseball pitcher from Corona, California, was the Kansas City Royals first round, fourth overall, draft pick in 2000. After Tommy John surgery in 2003, his rehab did not go as planned. He got as far as AAA in the

Royals' minor leagues. He retired and is a lawyer in the southern California now. His branch is from the Bowlus-Perham side.

In 2003, Kate Stodolka from Coon Rapids, MN, broke the all-time school scoring record in basketball at St. Catherine's College in St. Paul.

A Jim Stodolka from Avon, Minnesota is well known in the state for restoring older Chrysler vehicles. There is a Stodolka from central Minnesota who won the ten-million-dollar *Reader's Digest* Sweepstakes, a Stodolka who writes sci-fi novels, and another Stodolka in Canada who writes religious plays.

Summary

What I have learned by compiling this document is threefold. First of all, these people had to be both adventurous and somewhat desperate to leave what they had and travel to an unknown land. History tells us that the living conditions were declining in Poland in the late 19th century. The Prussian Government was failing with Bismarck governing and the economy was poor. Infant mortality rates were dwindling due to better medicine which resulted in larger families. The larger families were hard to provide for, so word of better conditions in a faraway land resulted in an exodus from Poland in the mid to late 1800s.

The Polish people as a group are predominately Catholic and proven survivors. They have been overthrown by several forces and yet have they still had prevailed. Even with all their history of being under numerous rulers, they are regarded as being quite a loyal people.

Secondly, I learned that all the Stodolkas appear to originate in Lower Silesia. St. Stanislaus church in Falkowice had pages of Stodolkas recorded. How many of these Stodolkas immigrated to America, and when, is unknown. As I visited Falkowice and noticed in the cemetery across the street from the church, there were no Stodolkas visible on the headstones. The fact of the matter is, they are there but have been covered by new graves. There are many familiar names but, no Stodolkas. Only the recent burials are visible due to conservation of land reasons. It appears my relatives are all underneath the present gravesites.

I have not found another resource that provides any factual documentation prov-

ing people existed with the Stodolka surname anywhere other than southern Poland around 1700. To my knowledge, available records do not indicate where this clan originated before that—possibly the Czech Republic.

This leads to my third fact. I never would have guessed how many Stodolkas there really are. I have had recent contact with Stodolkas in present day Germany, Canada, and Australia. I have no idea how many there are in Europe or anywhere else. I know of Stodolkas who, after immigrating to America, have branched out to Canada,

New York, Nebraska, Texas, and California.

I attended a reunion for Stodolkas in the summer of 2002. This was held in central Minnesota on a farm near Bowlus, MN. There were more than 130 Stodolkas present. At this time, there are no Stodolkas in the Royalton area. They have migrated to other areas of the state and the nation.

I know there exists a plethora of information still to be documented. This is an ongoing project. Thanks for your interest and if you have any information, please feel free to contribute by writing to me at <mstodolka@msn.com>. 🍀
