

ART WITH LASTING VALUE

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During the period of 1895-1901 or 1902 a local artist turned out a number of scenes of the Nativity. To the best of anyone's knowledge there were seven of these scenes of Bethlehem carved and painted by Mr. Ferdinand Pribyl. In all the sets the stable, manger, the Child Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are the central theme. [*Mr. and Mrs. Fred Stockbauer still, from time to time, display their scene during the Christmas season. Removing the pieces from the original box, which was especially crafted with a place for each item, and arranging them in their individual slots is time consuming but rewarding.*]

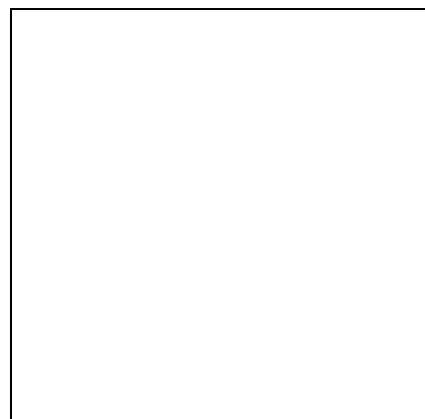
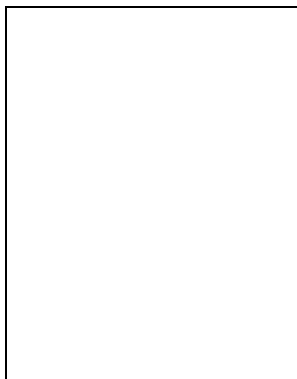
The background in all cases is that of Austria as Mr. Pribyl remembered his native land of mountains and streams. To the right of the stable the scenes are rural. Rolling hills, mountains, fir or pine trees, fields, a stream with a mill on the bank, farm houses, and livestock. The cut-out and hand-painted figures depict rural people carrying farm products to the manger.

On the left, the buildings of a city, with streets and a draw bridge, are shown in great detail. Here in this scene the town residents are taking presents of baked goods, cloth, and other items from the city. Musicians are in the crowd which is headed for Bethlehem to present their gifts to the new born child.

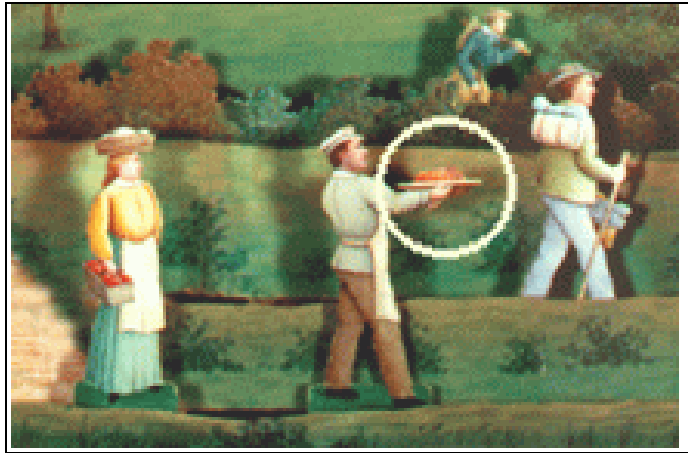
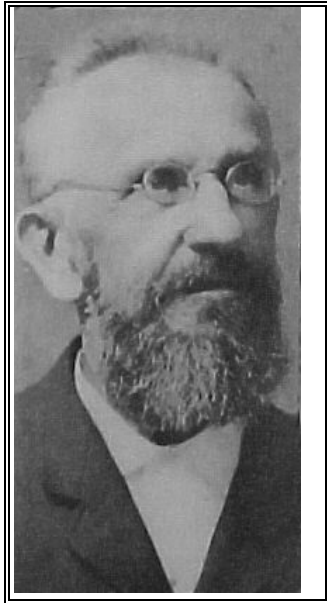
These scenes are elaborate, being from 14 to 18 feet long with four different elevations. The figures of people and animals, about six inches high, were cut and carved from several kinds of cardboard. Oatmeal boxes, old postal cards, pages from tailor's catalogues; any available material was used.



Mr. Pribyl mixed his own paints and every part of the large scene and the figures was painted in fine detail and brilliant colors. It is said that one of the ingredients used in the paint was paris green, a poison. To this day, insects or rats have not inflicted damage to these sets, even though some have been stored in barns and attics for years. [*Some minor damage was done by insects; the cake carried by one figure was attractive to a bug, but Elizabeth Stockbauer, an artist, repaired the missing piece.*]



During the life of this artist he carved and painted a number of these Bethlehem scenes. Seven of the sets are known to be in existence at this time. In 1898 a scene was completed and given to a son, Anton Pribyl. This is still in the possession of the children of Anton. In 1900, one was given to Mrs. Robert Hanak of Hallettsville who



was a first cousin. This set is now owned by her daughter, Mrs. Val Staha. B. F. Pribyl, a nephew, received a set which passed to V. F. Pribyl and today [1973] is in the hands of Mrs. Mary Lou Green, a daughter of V. F. Pribyl. Another, made in 1903, was given to his adopted son, Albert Stockbauer Sr., and now belongs to his descendants.

Three of the sets are in Victoria and two are set up in homes, one in the house of Mrs. L. G. (Annie) Hauboldt and the other at the home of Fred Stockbauer. In addition to the four given to relatives, Mr. Pribyl made, on order, three additional sets which were sold at a price of \$25 to \$30 each. These last three sets are owned by families of West, Texas, namely the Eddie Kubalas, Harry Lichnovskys, and the Machovakys. It is known that the Lichnovsky scene is usually displayed in the window of their grocery store each Christmas.

Something of the life of this artist, who at the age of about 60 produced these sets, should be recounted. Ferdinand Pribyl, the son of John Sr. and Klmitchek Pribyl, was born in Frenstat, Moravia, Oct. 11, 1840. At the time of his birth, Moravia was under the domination of Austria. The parents moved to Vienna, Austria, and Ferdinand entered the Austrian Army where he served some five years. *[Moravia and Bohemia at this time were provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Pribyl ancestors, skilled craftsmen, were sent from one of the German states into Austria-Hungary to build churches. After the treaty of Versailles which reorganized Eastern Europe in 1919 following World War I, Moravia and Bohemia became part of the new nation of Czechoslovakia.]*



While a resident of Vienna he was employed in a bank for five years. Ferdinand married Anna



Malcak, a native of the village of Netolice, Bohemia, Czechoslovakia. They became the parents of one child, Anton, who was born in Vienna, March 24, 1879. [*The flag atop the tower in the illustration below shows the colors of Vienna.*]

Ferdinand, his wife, and son came to America about 1883 and settled in Fayette County where he taught school at Bluff near La Grange, Tex. The next move was to Hallettsville with Mr. and Mrs. Pribyl both securing positions as teachers at the Catholic school of that town.

Ferdinand taught the boys while his wife, Anna, taught cooking, sewing, and other domestic courses to the girls. Among their pupils was Leopoldina Kallus, who became Mrs. Robert Hanak. She was given one of the sets made by Mr. Pribyl in 1900.

About 1892, at the insistence of his brother, John, the family moved to Victoria. Their new home was along the upper part of Dry Creek in the area of present day Beck Road west of the Guadalupe River. In 1896 Ferdinand and Anna purchased an 80 acre sandy land farm near Dry Creek from his brother, John, and here they lived, farmed, and raised their son, Anton, and an orphan cousin, Albert Stockbauer.

Ferdinand had received the usual education of his time while growing up in Austria. If he had any special instructions in art it is not recorded. From soldier to bank clerk in Europe, to school teacher and bookkeeper in Texas, then to the life of a successful farmer on a small sandy land farm shows the ability of Mr. Pribyl.



At the age when most men of 70 years were considered worn out by hard work, this man took up a new life, that of painting. That he did his work well is attested by the seven sets, the result of his handwork, which are still in existence and can be put on display today, some 70 years or more since [*approximately 100 years in 2002.*]they were created. From the labor of people like Ferdinand Pribyl we have this land of ours today. [*Mr. Bob Allen, photo technician at The Victoria College, applied his skill to record the nativity scene in five sections. Dr. Robert Shook, retired from the college history department scanned the prints and stitched the sections in computer software. The product are copies of Pribyl's art in two sizes.*]