

Milada Poliřenská

Anglo-American University
Prague

Documents on the United States and on Czechoslovak-U.S. Relations in the Czech Archives

1. Documents of governmental and other central institutions

Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

Loretánské náměstí 5
118 00 Prague 1 – Hradčany
+420 224 181 111

This archives is a key documentary source on the history of the United States and on Czechoslovak-American relations as well as on the American relationship toward Central Europe.

The basic building stones of Czechoslovak/Czech-American relations have been and are bilateral agreements and treaties that are kept in the Archives of International Treaties. The beginnings of mutual Czechoslovak-American relationship within a larger international framework of establishment of new independent state of Czechoslovakia demonstrate the documents from Paris Peace Conference in 1919. These documents are called Paris Archives and were already in the interwar period bound into gold-embossed leather volumes and placed into a special archival safe room. This shows how the documents have been valued by the Masaryk-Beneř establishment.

The Political Reports Collection is, I suppose, the most frequently studied archival fund in the Foreign Ministry Archives. For every researcher of Czechoslovak-American relations, the political reports, supplemented by economic, cultural and other reports of Czechoslovak legation, which was in 1943 upgraded to Embassy, are very important. These reports cover the entire period of mutual diplomatic relations until present, even though in the very oldest period after 1919 mainly operational telegrams were sent from Washington to Prague. The standard system of regular (i.e. monthly), periodic (i.e. quarterly) and special reports became a routine only later, under minister Frantiřek Chvalkovský, who served in Washington from 1923.

In the inter-war period, the basic structure of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry consisted of six Sections: Presidium (i.e. I Section) and Sections II–VI (Intelligence, Economic, Administrative, Propaganda, Legal) and Cabinet of the Minister. These Sections are fundamental components of the inter-war Foreign Ministry archives and contain very rich sources on the United States: diplomatic correspondence with Czechoslovak Legation in Washington, D.C. and with a network of Czechoslovak general consulates, consulates and honorary consulates, instruction letters, protocolar issues, agenda on Czech-American communities, negotiations on treaties and on Czechoslovak debts with the United States, exportation and importation agenda, appointments to the legation and to the consulates, recall of Czechoslovak diplomats, disciplinary issues and many other agendas that can not be counted here. All Sections have inventories and can be easily used by the researchers. A collection called Archives of Siberian Legions is not as important source for research on cooperation of Czechoslovak legions in Siberia with the American political and military representatives, as are the records of the same name in the Military Historical Archives.

The Foreign Ministry's records from the WWII period are in the so called London Archives. The documents on the United States include mainly the interaction of Czechoslovak Government in exile in London with Czechoslovak legation, from 1943 Embassy, in Washington, D.C., the files of the Czechoslovak missions in the United States, and particularly the contacts and agenda of the U.S. ambassador to the Czechoslovak Government in London Anthony Drexel-Biddle, who was prior to this appointment, from 1937 American Ambassador in Poland.

After the WWII, the structure of the Foreign Ministry was changed and instead of Sections, Territorial Departments have been established. This basic structure, several times modified during the time, exists till today and the structure of the Foreign Ministry Archives reflects this. The files on the United States are in the United States Territorial Department, which was during the past decades several times renamed and at times included also United Kingdom. Nowadays, there is a Department of American States, meaning all states in North, Central and South America. The files of Territorial Departments have been interconnected with the files of other departments: Cabinet of the Minister, Legal Department, Personnel (under communism called Cadre) Department, Press and Consular Departments and General Secretariat, and their records have also to be taken in account, even though the final destination of the files after the suggestions, expertise and decisions of other departments, often including a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and sometimes the Minister himself, was almost always Territorial Department and therefore in its records we find them. The finding aids are available and the files are open for research after 30 years which is the standard internationally recognized deadline for opening the documents for research. Today, most records are open up to 1989.

National Archives

Archivní 4/2257

149 00 Prague 4 – Chodovec

(+420) 974 847 247

National Archives in Prague contains a large variety of important documents to the history of United States in the range from emigration to the New World from Czech lands under the Habsburgs to the control of the Czechoslovak foreign policy by the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

The records of the Czech Land Governor's Office (1850–1918) are crucial for research on the emigration to America. Governor's Office also contains records of the American consulate in Prague which operated here from 1869 to 1917 and for thirty years it was the only foreign consulate in Prague.

It has to be added, however, that the sources documenting various stages of emigration process can be found also in many archives at the regional and district levels. Even small regional museums sometimes have the letters of Czech Americans sent to their friends and relatives in the old fatherland. The National Archives in Prague further contains records of Government (Presidium and Ministries) and other central institutions from 1918 up to the recent decades unless they have their own so called special archives – these are just Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior. All the agencies of the Czechoslovak Government in Exile during the WWII with the exception of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are also deposited in the National Archives. In all these governmental archival collections we can find documents related to the United States, but their majority is in other collections and archives, as specified in this paper.

One of the most important collections for us is the Archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia which belongs today to the IV Department of the National Archives. The Department of International Politics of the Central Committee executed instructions and orders of Moscow through the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other institutions and had, under the pretext of observing the ideological correctness and preserving the leading role of Communist Party, key influence on the Czechoslovak foreign policy and diplomacy. The United States were for the countries of the Soviet bloc an imperial enemy number one and therefore the files of the Department of International Politics are very important for every researcher on the Cold War. We can find here analyses of the situation in the United States, tactics and strategies, decisions on appointments of diplomatic personnel from the level of an Ambassador down to the level of cooks and drivers, always accompanied by a position of comrades in Moscow, decisions about policies toward the Czech American communities, decisions about the Czechoslovak visits in the United States and vice versa, decisions about possible cultural imports and exports,

e.g. movies, concerts, translations of books, and many others. The Archives of Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia is very large and a rather complicated one and the files of various commissions and departments including the Department of International Politics have been processed only to the 1960's, yet this archives belongs to the most frequently used by the researchers.

Security Services Archives

Siwecova 2
130 00 Prague 3
info@ustrcr.cz
(+420) 221 008 111, (+420) 221 008 212

The Security Services Archives represents from ideological, secret services and other reasons another crucial archives for study the sources on the United States. It represents one section of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. Documents on intelligence and counter-intelligence, military intelligence, on monitoring of American diplomats, journalists and visitors in Czechoslovakia, investigations of Czechoslovaks based on different but always Cold-War related issues and also files of secret agents who operated either within the country against the U. S. citizens or in the United States, and various concepts and plans are deposited here. Some of the records are still being processed by the archivists and are not available for study yet.

Military Historical Archives

Sokolovská 136/24
186 00 Prague 8 – Karlín
podatelna@vuapraha.cz
Secretary: (+420) 973 206 126
Research Room: (+420) 973 206 101

Military Historical Archives which is a section of the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, is in charge for the records going back to 1723. Its collections are divided by the year 1945 into two major sections. For those who are interested in the research of American issues are of importance the collections from WWI related to Czechoslovak legions and to the Czech and Slovak communities in the United States. Also important are military records from WWII, particularly on the Allied concepts on post-war reconstruction of Czechoslovakia and on liberation of the Western part of Bohemia by the American army. The period after WWII is represented particularly by the files and reports of Czechoslovak military attachés in the United States.

Archives of the Czech National Bank

Česká národní banka
Sekce správní
Odbor správy majetku
Archiv ČNB
Na Příkopě 28
115 03 Prague 1
archiv@cnb.cz

This archives is important for study of financial diplomacy and of financial flows between Czechoslovakia and the United States. The records of the Czechoslovak National Bank are deposited here as well as of other banks many of which had a direct relationship with the United States, such as e.g. the American-Slovak Bank, established in Bratislava by an American banker of Slovak descent Michal Bosák.

Archives of the Office of the President of the Czech Republic

Jiřská Street 2
119 08 Prague 1 – Castle
archivkpr@hrad.cz
(+420) 224 373 682

Archives of the Office of the President of the Czech Republic has a certain amount of documents on the United States, but not as many as we would expect. From the Presidency of Edvard Beneš there are mainly copies of reports from selected legations and later embassies including Washington, D.C. Another so called London Archives from the period of Beneš's exile in London during the WWII contains mainly records on Czechoslovak communities abroad, e.i. also in the United States, files related to various aspects of cooperation with the Allies and therefore also with the Americans, and particularly files on Beneš's official visit in the United States in 1943. A very rich collection of photographs with pictures of appointments of foreign diplomats by the Czechoslovak Presidents including very rare photographs of first American ministers in Prague Richard Crane and Lewis Einstein, was transferred to the Archives of National Museum as a collection called Castle Archives.

2. Sources of non-governmental character

Archives of National Museum

Na Zátorách 6
170 00 Prague 7 – Holešovice
e-mail: archivnm@nm.cz

(+420) 220 877 863

(+420) 220 802 530

Besides Castle collection of photographs transferred to this archives from Archives of the Office of the President of the Czech Republic, the Archives of National Museum has many collections to offer to the researchers on the United States.

This large and heterogeneous archives contains also personal papers of diplomats and other personalities that lived and worked in the United States. There are here personal papers of Zdeněk Fierlinger who was Czechoslovak minister in Washington from 1925 to 1928, of wife of minister of Foreign Affairs and of President of Czechoslovakia Edvard Beneš Hana Benešová and of Edvard Beneš's brother Vojtěch, usually called Vojta.

Archives of Physical Education and Sports

Historical building of National Museum

Václavské náměstí 68, 115 79 Prague 1

archiv_odtvs@nm.cz

(+420) 224 497 186

Archives of Physical Education and Sports is one of the departments of the Archives of National Museum. For us, the most important is a historical collection of the gymnastic organization Sokol. The Sokol movement used to be very widespread in the Czech lands and also within the Czech communities abroad and besides gymnastic and sport activities it had also significant patriotic and nation building mission. The Sokols in America enthusiastically supported the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia and the Masarykian traditions. The Archives of Physical Education and Sports contains also the YMCA and YWCA records and various sources documenting the sports that came from America, became very popular in the Czech lands and contributed also to the popularity of the United States.

Museum of Antonín Dvořák

Ke Karlovu 20, 120 00 Prague 2

a_dvorak_museum@nm.cz

(+420) 224 918 013, (+420) 224 923 363)

Another section of the National Museum is Museum of Czech Music. The so called Museum of Antonín Dvořák is part of it. This probably internationally most renowned Czech composer lived and worked from 1892 to 1895 in the United States. He was a director of the newly established American National Conservatory in New York and composed here his famous symphony From the New World, to mention just a few of facts. This museum as well as Dvořák's

memorials in his birthplace in Nelahozeves and in his residence in Vysoká near Příbram have interesting documents about his relationship to America.

Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures

Betlémské náměstí 1, 110 00 Prague 1
(+420)224 497 500, (+420) 224 497 511
naprstek@nm.cz

This is another component of National Museum. This museum was named after Vojtěch (Vojta) Náprstek, Czech philanthropist, patriot and politician, as well as a pioneer of Czech language journalism in the United States. Náprstek came from a middle class family which owned a well prospering beer brewery in Prague Old Town. As a university student, Vojta was actively involved in the revolution of 1848 and finally, to save himself from persecution, he fled to the United States where he lived for ten years. He published newspaper in Czech for Czech immigrants and organized the Czech community. He made several research trips to American Indian tribes and his ethnographical collections became after his return to Prague a foundation of a museum which Náprstek opened in his home and where the Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures named after him is even today.

Vojtěch Náprstek was an enthusiastic and effective organizer of national life and we could speak for a long time about his various activities. As an example, we should mention at least the American Ladies Club which was a very popular first Czech women association and also an important educational and emancipatory institution for women and girls in which Charlotte Garrigue Masaryk was a very active member and in which lectured her husband T. G. Masaryk – a university professor and later the first president of Czechoslovakia. Náprstek museum offers today to the researchers not only ethnographical collections from the territory of the United States and a library with a rich literary collections, but also sources on history of emigration from Habsburg monarchy to the United States and on the inspirational influence of the United States in the Czech environment.

Institute of T.G. Masaryk and Archives of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic

Gabčíkova 2362/10
182 00 Prague 8
mua@mua.cas.cz
(+420) 286 010 110

Institute of T. G. Masaryk was established by T.G. Masarykin 1932 as a foundation with the main task to take care for and administer the T.G.Masaryk library and archives, to publish Masaryk's works and to assist and support researchers. After the interruption of the work during the Protectorate and reestablishment

of the institute after the WWII, this institute was closed in 1954. It was renewed by President Václav Havel in 1990, later it became part of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and fused with the Archives of the Academy of Sciences. Collections of the Institute of T. G. Masaryk as well as of the Archives of the Academy of Sciences contain interesting sources to the United States history and to the American influence in Czech lands. There are here, for example, ten archival boxes of documents of members of Masaryk's family and in each of them we can find some documents related to America. T. G. Masaryk, whose wife Charlotte was an American, their son Jan and daughter Alice had a very cordial relationship to the United States and many political, professional and personal connections. Many interesting documents and photographs in the Institute's collections document this. Edvard Beneš Collection contains also documents on America. Further, we can find in this archives a large variety of documents – personal papers of Czechoslovak scholars who lived and worked in the United States, such as Otakar Odložilík (university professor of history, who during his exile in the United States during the WWII and after 1945 taught at several universities in the United States) and Stanislav Špaček (a technical engineer, diplomat of Czechoslovak legation in Washington, propagator of American technologies and methods of work). A voluminous documentation illuminates the cooperation of institutes of Academy of Sciences with academic institutions and universities in the United States including approvals and, under the communist regime very frequent denials of research stays of Czechoslovak scholars in the United States as well as of American scholars in Czechoslovakia – their stays were also limited and strictly controlled. Yet, an unexpected fact is that even under the communist regime, every year several dozens of researchers from Czechoslovakia were allowed to go to the United States based on American stipends or exchange agreements. This opportunity was given by the communist regime mainly to the specialists in technical, biological and medical disciplines and mainly in the 1960'. The humanities and social sciences were basically without a chance and also during the twenty years of so called normalization period (from the oppression of Prague Spring to the collapse of communism) the opportunities were minimal or zero. From the point of view of history of science, the academic interaction between Czechoslovakia and the United States was not yet researched in its complexity. The Archives of the Academy of Sciences is a very rich source for this research question.

In many respects, the same applies to the universities.

Archives of Charles University

Ovocný trh 3/5

116 36 Prague 1

(+420) 224 228 104

(+420) 224 228 463

Archives of the Czech Technological University

Zikova 4, 166 36 Prague 6
(+420) 22435 1111

Archives of Charles University – our oldest and most famous university – and Archives of the Czech Technological University (established as an institution in 1803) contain documents to the visits and lectures of American professors, to student exchanges, to study of American students at Charles University and Czech Technological University, to the awarding of Doctorates Honoris Causa.

In the inter-war period, the United States were very popular in Czechoslovakia, particularly among the artists, musicians, actors, theater and movie directors, designers, sportsmen, students. Many delegations of various professional and interest associations travelled to the United States and at the same time businessmen, entrepreneurs, artists, charity activists, missionaries and others came from the United States to Czechoslovakia. These visits are mainly documented in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, in respect of the study abroad stays and internships of Czechoslovak students and young scholars at the universities in the United States, the agenda related to the transfers of credits and recognition of study results and other administrative agenda is in the university archives. During the communist regime, the student stays in the United States were very limited, available usually only to “firm cadres” and again, to the technological, biological and medical fields of study. It can be presumed that the outgoing students were subject to an ideological pressure by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior organs.

Literary Archives of the Museum of Czech Literature

Strahovské nádvoří 1/132
118 38 Prague 1
post@pamatnik-np.cz
(+420) 220 516 695

Literary Archives of the Museum of Czech Literature is a place where we can find very interesting documents related to the United States. This very large archives contains a number of personal collections of not only writers, but also scholars, politicians, diplomats and artists, many of whom had close links to the United States, lived there, sent letters, published, worked as editors of Czech newspapers and journals in America. It was for example Josef Václav Sládek (1845–1912), Czech poet, translator, editor and publisher, who lived several years in the United States. After his return, he remained throughout his life influenced by American literature, which he translated, and by American democracy, which he highly valued yet disagreed at the same time with slavery and with the oppression of American Indians. This archives contains also papers of Vojta Náprstek who was mentioned above, and also, for example, of Jan

Werich (1905–1980). Werich was a Czech actor and playwright, who was from the 2nd half of 1920's together with Jiří Voskovec a leading figure of Liberated Theater (Osvobozené divadlo) and of Czech anti-Nazi political satire. Both actors, Werich and Voskovec, spent the WWII in the United States. After the war, Werich returned in Czechoslovakia and stayed here during the communist regime while Voskovec returned to in the United States, and their relationship became complicated.

Conclusion

In the conclusion it has to be said that during twenty five years from the collapse of communism, the range of contacts between Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic in the areas of education, research, culture, business, art, in many projects and also in the mobility of Czechs and Americans to the other country increased enormously. In the Czech Republic, in 2014 live, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Interior,¹ 3129 Americans with a permanent residency in the Czech Republic, 1559 out of them in Prague. Many of them established here their families.

Even if we – particularly middle and older generation – may have the impression that the collapse of communism occurred just recently and that it is part of our present time, in reality the documents from the beginning of 1990's will fall very soon in the category of archival documents. Besides, many businesses and companies including those with American participation are obliged to respect the archival law and to subject their documentation to the proper record keeping and management. This presentation aimed at characterization of basic groups of sources on the U. S. history and on the Czechoslovak /Czech American relations respectively in a larger central European context. Yet, the time is approaching when new archival documents will open many new research questions and topics of contemporary history in this area.

¹ <http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/cizinci-s-povoleny-m-pobytem>