

The History of the Museum of Czech Literature Literary Archive since the National Museum Period

The chronicle of today's Museum of Czech Literature Literary Archive (MCL LA) goes back to the dawn of the 19th century; factually to 1818, the year of the establishment of the National Museum.

I. The Outset of the Museum of Czech Literature Literary Archive – the National Museum Era

The mission of the Museum that is stated in the programme policy among others is to amass anything 'that pertains to national literature and national production ...' Although the first documented acquisition of objects dates from 1822, it was J. Dobrovský's inheritance gained in 1829-1830 that would represent the true milestone in the early stage of acquisition activities. What followed next were the inheritances of persons somehow engaged in the Museum's activities (K. Šternberk, V. Hanka, and more). A collection of manuscripts held in the library would grow at random, and be added mostly by donations or legacies. One rare exception is represented by the purchase of the inheritance of enormous importance from P. J. Šafařík in 1864. Documents related to the figures who had seen the outset of Czech science (e.g., J. E. Purkyně, F. Palacký, W. W. Tomek), or who had been important for the development of Czech literature (F. L. Čelakovský, J. Kolár, K. J. Erben, part of the fonds of K. H. Mácha, B. Němcová, K. Havlíček Borovský, J. Neruda) would be gradually growing until the beginning of World War 1.

Writings had not been systematically compiled in the course of the 19th century, no more than a minor part was catalogued; acquisition lists would not be kept until 1898. Literary legacies (without correspondence), alphabetically ordered correspondence, written monuments (manuscripts and personal documents of figures' legacies not possessed by the Museum) underwent the complete cataloguing and classification by the methodology recognised in those times between 1915 and 1923. January 1st, 1924 marks a great landmark in the history of this institution when the Literary Archive was established as one separate sub-department of the National Museum Library. Josef Volf, who had been entrusted with the collections of manuscripts administration a year before, and Miloslav Novotný, his successor, began to systematically draft a collection of the legacies and writings of outstanding figures mostly engaged in the sphere of Czech culture, and would acquire the archives of prominent publishing houses, editorial offices and associations. By the 1940s, the collections in the Literary Archive had expanded with the inheritance of J. Arbes, the correspondence of J.S. Machar and J. Vrchlický, the editorial archive of the publishing house Ottovo nakladatelství, Emanuel Lešehrad's collection (the so-called *Lešehradeum*), and more. The Archive held 1,250,000 units no later than in the late 1930s, which indicates an enormous increase in comparison with 1923 (only 76,308 units). However, the trend halted during the German occupation of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia when the focus primarily shifted to the protection of the collections.

The post-war era and the 1950s saw the resumption of intense acquisition activity. Acquisitions involved, e.g., the archive of J.V. Frič's family, private fonds of K. Teige or the Mrštík Brothers, the manuscript collection from the Karásek Gallery. The fonds became open

to researchers through the printed listings; their own archival sources would be published in the form of editions in *The Almanac of the National Museum* from 1958 onwards. It was followed by another almanac entitled *The Literary Archive* (1966) after considerable organizational changes. The almanac has been the key periodical mediating archival collections since those times.

That intense acquisition of objects had led to a serious shortage of storage rooms for the collections, and consequently the Literary Archive moved from the National Museum's main building to the confiscated Strahov Monastery in July 1953, where it would share the site with related institutions: the Museum of Czech Literature (MCL) and the Institute for Czech Literature, the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. The National Museum Literary Archive (independent department from 1962) was incorporated into the Museum of Czech Literature on 1 January 1964.

II. The Establishment of the Museum of Czech Literature and the Early Decade of Existence

As a newly established Czech literary museum, the Museum of Czech Literature would be closely tied to the Strahov Monastery from the very beginning of its existence. The first permanent exhibition opened on May 8th, 1953. Initially, the Museum of Czech Literature's only department of documentation began to collect material mostly related to that display; however, the department would house documents linked with the actual activities as well. The Museum kept on accepting donations intended for a future independent literary archive, and would acquire documents from the inheritances of A. Pražák, S. Čech, K. Biebel; from the archive of the publishing house Družstevní práce, and from J. R. Vilímek, or, e.g., the fonds of literary active Strahov's Premonstratensians, which would be included in the future collection.

The collections of both institutions merged once the National Museum Literary Archive had been incorporated into the Museum of Czech Literature; the Archive had contained less than a quarter of today's MCL LA at the time of the collections transfer to the MCL administration. The basic registration of all fonds finished in the 1960s under Jaromír Loužil's direction; that year also saw the adoption of a new cataloguing system. The spaces of the Monastery would soon become insufficient owing to the intense acquisition of objects, therefore the Museum of Czech Literature would rent a castle, Staré Hrady, situated close to the small town of Libáň to create thereafter in its reconstruction (1972) a significant detached workplace of the Archive, and to gradually move most of the MCL LA's fonds to new depositories situated there.

Depository spaces in Strahov underwent modernization in no time, which increased the storing capacity in the main building of the institution. The acquisition policy, officially heavily subsidized by the State, was reflected in gains of numerous outstanding collection groups in the 1970s and the 1980s. The wholes that deserve mention out of these unique, vast collections are: the fonds of V. Nezval, T. Nováková, A. Novák, J. Werich and letters from F. Kafka. Devoting their hard effort, the Archive professionals would also acquire collections of writings of banned authors (Z. Kalista, F. Křelina, V. Černý, and many more).

III. The Museum of Czech Literature Literary Archive after 1990

The political changes in 1989 brought about particular changes in the MCL LA composition. Sections of fonds not corresponding to the Archive's objective had undergone delimitation and were moved to other institutions. The Literary Archive received in return, fonds or their sections from the National Museum Archive and the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences Archive. Despite the dramatic decrease in financial resources to buy new acquisitions, the Archive collections continued growing. Extensive archives of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers or publishing houses *Československý spisovatel* and *Melantrich* were acquired after 1989, besides numerous private fonds or additions (I. Blatný, L. Fuks, J. Foglar, B. Hrabal, Fr. Hrubín, J. Chaloupecký, Mňačko, and more).

As to the registration of collections and access to them, considerable changes occurred in the early 21st century when information about collections began to be stored in the national database of archival fonds, and archival records began to be processed by computer systems. Earlier finding aids were transferred into a specialised database system, which allows searching in records and the registries of fonds via the Internet interface, so making collections easier to access. The latest major change in the field of registration and material processing took place in 2013 with coming *The Basic Rules of Archival Processing* published by the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, Archiving Administration and Filing Service Department, Prague into force.

The early 1990s saw the Museum of Czech Literature facing a long-standing problem caused by a shortage of appropriate spaces. The institution rented part of previously owned sites once the Monastery had been given back to the Premonstratensian Order, yet it had to abandon most of the exhibition area. The Premonstratensians had received part of collection wholes and inheritances of the Order members stored in the MCL LA. Some archival records had to be moved from Staré Hrady, which had been purchased by a new owner, to the depository in Duchcov. The remaining material was moved out at the beginning of 2016 to be stored in a newly renovated depository in Litoměřice, fully satisfying new modern requirements of archival material preservation. The collections provisionally stored in Duchcov were moved to the new depository in no time.