

The Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk Institute: Past and Present

Foundation of the Institute

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia, established the Institute to which he gave his name as a foundation in the year 1932. In the dedicatory document, he defined the mission of the Institute as follows:

- 1) to maintain and systematically build up the library and the archives in the manner established by my praxis thus far, or, if need be, according to certain directives issued by the curatorship upon consultation with me;
- 2) to process internally the material entrusted by me as well as that obtained thereafter and to prepare relevant material for publication; in accordance with the possibility of organising lectures, courses and extension courses and, similarly, to make use of the results obtained;
- 3) to continue the editing and publication of my own writings;
- 4) to enable scientists to conduct external studies and scientific work within the framework of the library and archive regulations as stipulated by the curatorship, in consultation with me; the library and the archives are to be reference in nature;
- 5) to edit or to contribute to publishing the results of this external work as well as other publications, provided the curatorship considers them to be relevant in subject and approach;
- 6) as to the museum – to hold the items donated to me and to make them accessible to the public according to the regulations laid down by the curatorship.

In fulfilment of the abovementioned tasks, Masaryk transferred to the foundation his archives, the library comprising about 70 thousand volumes and an even greater number of various items, intended for the eventual establishment of a museum. He provided the Institute with an initial financial deposit amounting to 10 million Czechoslovak crowns. At the end of the thirties, the Institute had nearly 17 million Czechoslovak crowns in valuables and on deposit books. Masaryk established a five-member curatorship to direct the Institute. Prominent members included Masaryk's daughter, Alice, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edvard Beneš.

During the first years of its existence, the Institute was located within the Prague Castle complex. In signing the Dedicatory document, its founder presumed that in the course of time, a new building would be built for the Institute. Paragraph 4 of the Dedication document includes the statement: „The aim of the foundation is to establish and to maintain the Institute in its own building as a working centre.“ In the year 1935, the government of the Republic realised this aim. On the occasion of the president's 85th birthday, the government donated to the Institute a building site in Prague-Letná (registered in the Land Register of cadastral area, Holešovice-Bubny), with an area of 3038 square meters. Even before the war, selected architects began work on the proposed building. When the Institute was compelled to leave Prague Castle in Autumn 1938, its curatorship purchased a tenement-house in Prague-Bubeneč.