

The Polabské (Elbe) Ethnographic Museum at Přerov nad Labem

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The origins of the Ethnographic Museum at Přerov nad Labem, which stands in an ancient settlement on the flat, fertile land that stretches along the middle course of the Labe (Elbe), are closely bound up with the Provincial Jubilee Exhibition held in Prague in 1891. The owner of the Přerov estate, Archduke Ludwig Salvador of Tuscany, influenced by the “Czech cottages” exhibited, purchased the former manorial smithy and reeve’s house, dating to the beginning of the 18th century, that stood near his château, and had them converted to their present form, fitting them out with folk relics from Přerov and its immediate surroundings. Because the area around the “Old Czech Cottage”, as the buildings came tellingly to be known, was made into a park, with a bell tower and well added, it may be regarded as one of the earliest ethnographic open-air museums in Central Europe. At the beginning of the Occupation in 1939 the “Old Czech Cottage” was cleared out, and the collections transferred to the closest regular museum, that in Český Brod.

Only in 1967, after general renovations, was the “Old Czech Cottage” transferred into the care of the Polabské Museum in Poděbrady, where a new ethnographic department was established. At the same time as the first exposition was being built, the first smaller buildings from elsewhere in the Nymburk region were also brought to stand close to the museum, because they were threatened on their original sites (a bell tower from Kozovazy, a wooden well from Nymburk, a fruit drying house from Břístev, a log storehouse from Vlkava and others). This resulted in the creation of the first protected open-air museum of the skanzen type for the middle Labe – The Polabské (Elbe) Ethnographic Museum at Přerov nad Labem.

The transfer of larger structures into the park in front of the château, where a memorial to the fallen of Přerov in the First World War and the “Liberty Linden” are also to be found, began in 1972 with the transport of a large, log-built cottage, no. 7, from Draho near Nymburk. This extraordinarily well-preserved cottage, retaining its original 1766 state, was also selected in part because of its unusual interior layout, with a dwelling and storehouse beneath one roof. Two years later it was joined by a smaller, chamber-type cottage from Chvalovice near Poděbrady (no. 9), with a timbered living area and exceptionally beautiful composite gable, intended to represent typical agricultural dwellings of the first half of the 19th century.

In 1973 the museum area was considerably expanded by the addition of the former estate gamekeeper’s lodge with its yard, outbuildings and adjacent gardens. A unique, two-storey, timbered hop-grower’s barn from nearby Mrzky,

dating to 1782, was subsequently set in the corner of the garden, and an orchard of fruit trees traditionally grown along the Labe planted around it. The simple gateways at the sides of the lodge have been replaced by copies of two gates from rural homesteads, typical of the region – one is Baroque, from Kouty near Poděbrady, and the other Neo-Classical, from Kozovazy in the Český Brod region. The yard behind the lodge also plays host to a pretty manorial building of the mid-18th century – a large, log-built storehouse from the parsonage at Křinec, which now contains a permanent exhibition on the miller’s craft along the Labe. The original storehouse in the barn that was part of the lodge contains another permanent exhibition, on “Laundering clothes in the past”. Over time other sheds and shelters have been added around the barn from Mrzky, in order that an extensive exhibition might be installed on old agricultural tools, machinery and modes of transport.

New opportunities for holding larger ethnographic exhibitions came to the Polabské Museum with the making over of another building originally belonging to the estate, between the gamekeeper’s lodge and the château – the old cooper’s shop. The actual cooperage workshop had to be demolished down to its foundations in 1978-80 and rebuilt, which gave rise to a large exhibition hall in a fitting style. This now contains a large and materially diverse exhibition “Village crafts and trades in the past”. The neighbouring space is reserved for smaller, temporary exhibitions, usually of material from the museum collections, of which several are held each year. In due course further parts of this large building, originally from the 16th century, were also reconstructed, and the old classroom that was actually to be found here in the years 1848-1883 recreated. A school exhibition room was also arranged, and the adjacent corridor fitted out for occasional small exhibitions of various kinds.

At the same time as the old cooper’s was added, the museum area also grew through the addition of further gardens, covering almost 2 hectares. Obtaining this new space was the spur for a new, thorough survey of surviving vernacular architecture in the Nymburk district, on the basis of which several typical, structurally interesting and, most importantly, still accessible cottages and smaller outbuildings were selected. Of these, it has been possible to build three units – a model settlement comprising elements from three, ethnographically slightly different parts of the Nymburk district: the typically agricultural Městec Králové area in the far east, the central area between Nymburk and Poděbrady, i.e. that first affected by the advances in agriculture made in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the Rožďalovice area in the north, where vernacular architecture has survived longest.

Building of the lower part of the museum began in 1982 with the reconstruction of a smaller log cabin (no. 57) from Dymokury, representative of the dwellings of the landless, and here presented as the household of a village cobbler and seamstress at the beginning of the 20th century. In the years that followed a large log cabin (no. 45) was brought in from Střihov to represent agricultural dwellings in the Městec Králové area. While originally erected in 1777, it was reconstructed at the museum as it would have appeared after structural alterations made in 1860. This is matched by the interiors, complemented by a permanent exhibition on

“Warmth in the House” and examples of the hosier’s craft. At the same time a typical, log-built granary was brought from nearby Vinice, along with animal sheds from the neighbouring village of Záhornice and other minor structures from the Městec Králové area, all dating to the mid-19th century.

The third building to be chosen for the lower part of the museum was a log cabin from Kovanice, representative of a farmer’s dwelling from the densely settled region along the Labe around Nymburk. This small, log-built house, with a rarely-surviving porch and open-hearth kitchen as a separate room was essentially modernised at the beginning of the 20th century. For this reason the interior is fitted out with more recent domestic furniture as well, to show the changes that occurred in the rural household during the first half of the 20th century.

Later, a small log cabin (no. 4) from Pojedy near Rožďalovice was sited close to the Kovanice cottage. This was built in the first half of the 19th century, and because it was occupied by a farm-hand or retired peasant farmer it represents the homes of the poorest inhabitants of villages along the Labe. To make the simple interior more interesting, basket-weaving and broom-making take place inside – typical work at home for those receiving pensions in kind.

An interesting, early 19th century, timber barn from Jabkenice, a braced St Andrew’s cross and the neighbouring log-built storehouse with penthouse from Vinice – containing a small exhibition on Labe wine-growing and the oldest exhibit in the museum, a large 1712 wine press – were gradually added to the area around the latest and largest home-

stead, planned for the space beneath the Renaissance château rampart. In future a stylised environment will be created here to play host to a wide variety of ethnographic events, performances and refreshment options.

At present the Polabské Ethnographic Museum at Přerov nad Labem covers an area of some 2,5 ha, within which stand 32 buildings, including 7 cottages, 5 granaries and 2 barns, and a total exhibition area of over 1500 m². The museum houses more than 20,000 ethnographic objects of the most diverse kinds, from large threshers and carts to icons. Around half of these items can be seen by visitors both in the interiors and exteriors of the buildings and in a range of special, ethnographic exhibitions. The remaining objects are preserved as a study collection in depositories. The most valuable items, among which are painted vernacular furniture, embroideries and paintings on glass, come from the older collections of the Polabské Museum, and were obtained as early as at the end of the 19th century in the Poděbrady area for both the Jubilee Exhibition and the Czecho-Slavic Ethnographic Exhibition. This rich collection has since 1967 been continuously expanded through the museum’s own acquisitions, not only for particular exhibitions but in particular for the multifaceted documentation of life in the Labe villages from the end of the 18th to the second half of the 20th centuries. The collections of items from the areas of spiritual culture and folk art also continue to grow, in connection with the annual “Spring in the Village” and “Folk Christmases on the Labe” exhibitions of popular customs.



- ❖ Průčelí roubených chalup ze Střihova a z Kovanic, vytvářející dojem části polabské návsi v 19. století.
- ❖ The facades of the log-built homes from Střihov and Kovanice, giving an impression of how part of a village on the Labe would have looked in the 19th century.
- ❖ Die Frontseite der gezimmerten Bauernhäuser aus Střihov und Kovanice, die den Eindruck eines Teils des Dorfplatzes im Elbegebiet im 19. Jahrhundert bilden.