

EARLY HISTORY OF AGRICULTURAL HIGHER LEARNING IN CZECH LANDS

The first chair of agricultural higher learning (field cultivation) in the Czech Lands was established by Empress Maria Theresia as part of the faculty of philosophy at the Prague University in 1776. The chair was transferred to the Prague Polytechnic in 1812. The students of the faculty of law and later even of some of the technical fields who wanted to apply for top management positions in the country estates thereby got an opportunity to extend their education by attending optional lectures in agriculture.

In the early 19th century agriculture was also included in the curricula at theological faculties as the priests had been expected to help introduce the most recent skills in farm production through their contacts with the countryside population. Lectures in agriculture also started in 1816 at the school of philosophy in Brno. The then teacher training chair was later transferred to the Brno Polytechnic. Besides, as early as at the end of 18th century, schools of training the future estate officers were established at some of the estates.

Governments throughout Europe took the matter of agricultural education with different intensity. Prussia took the lead at the start of 19th century thanks to Albert Thaer. This reformer of Prussian and due to his general influence even of the entire European agriculture, founded in 1806 at his estate in Moeglin the first agricultural school of higher learning – an Academy. Similar schools were then established not only in Germany but

even in the other neighbouring countries. The first agricultural academy in the Austrian Empire with German language of instruction was founded in the Hungarian Magyar-Óvár (nowadays Mosonmagyaróvár) near Bratislava in 1818. Secondary school graduates were admitted with one year's farming experience. Estate officers in the Czech Lands who acquired some agricultural education in the first half of 19th century were usually the graduates of some of the academies in Germany (mostly in Hohenheim), or of the Hungarian academy.

The agricultural academies were established in the country so that the students had first-hand experience in farming, but they were at the same time secluded from the scientific centres in large cities. For this reason some of them ceased to exist, but some others merged with university-type schools due to the teaching staff's efforts. (First such unsuccessful experiment was the association of the agricultural academy at Greifswald with the University in Jena in 1826.)

Agricultural education of all types could start to flourish in Europe only after the abolition of serfdom and manorial labour, i.e. after 1848.

In Bohemia, the Patriotic-Agricultural Society founded two public agricultural schools in 1850, the Czech and the German schools, aimed at the education of the farmers' and estate-officers' sons. In Děčín-Libwerda a department of higher education was established in 1856 at the agricultural school with German language of in-



University building in Tábor: The Higher Land Institute (Landwirtschaftliche Akademie) for Czech students in Tábor 1866

struction. The Higher Land Institute for Czech students was founded in Tábor in 1866. Both nationals could later attend a network of lower and higher agricultural schools or schools of special instruction (dairy, horticulture, viticulture, etc.).

In 1861 Justus von Leibig strongly criticised the agricultural academies in his speech at the Munich Academy of Sciences. His influence caused their quick end in Germany with only two surviving: one in Poppelsdorf, Bonn, in connection with the university, and the other in Hohenheim nr. Stuttgart. In 1863 prof. Julius Kuhn managed to merge the agricultural department with the university in Halle. These events started a new trend in higher agricultural education. Agricultural high schools were established either as university departments or technical institutes or as independent high schools. Agricultural academies became second-class schools.

This new trend in the development of agricultural higher learning left its mark upon the situation in the Austrian Empire. The Czech Land Assembly adopted in 1864 a land law regulating the unrestrained establishment of agricultural schools which envisaged the existence of the future academies as well as an agricultural university.

Following the national settlement in 1867 (the Austro-Hungarian dualism) the agricultural academy in Mosonmagyóvár appeared to be situated in the Hungarian part of the monarchy. Thus it was necessary to fill up the vacuum in the Cisleithan Regions, i.e. in that part of Austrian empire along the border river the Leitha. Both in Prague and in Vienna talks took place over the establishment of an agricultural school of the highest type – the university. In 1871 the negotiations culminated with an idea of joining such a school with the Prague university or the polytechnic, but the talks ended in a failure due to the high costs of the establishment and running such a school. In the background of the failure, however, were not only financial reasons but also political. After the split, the government in Vienna started to concentrate the top economic institutions and schools in the capital city and that was why the first agricultural university in the Cisleithan Regions was founded on 15 October 1872 in Vienna under the name of the *Hochschule für Bodenkultur in Wien*. This school of higher learning was financed from the imperial budgets and it was subordinated to the ministry of culture and education in Vienna. Its founders declared that the school fully complied with the needs of all academic youth represented in the Imperial Council. The German language was the language of instruction being the speech of only one of the mother tongues of a number of nations dwelling in the Cisleithan Regions.

The Czechs were unhappy with such developments and they continued to call for the establishment of a school of agricultural higher learning even in Prague. They argued over the language barrier which the non-German speaking students had to cope with, and they also spoke of the specific economic situation in the Czech lands.

The Czech Land Assembly therefore continued to count with an agricultural university in Prague in the process of re-structuring the educational system launched in 1884.

Dr. J. B. Lambl, professor of agriculture at the Czech technical university in Prague, described the failure of all efforts to establish an agricultural school of higher learning in Prague, in his book *Manual of Agriculture* published in 1888, as follows: “The relevant agrarian circles with their undoubtedly good intentions had forgotten that the academic character of a learned institution required and needed not only the purely academic community, but that many other important academic measures needed to be taken care of. They apparently cherished a hope that the new institution had a great future that it would flourish quickly towards the necessity of perfection and for the wealth of the country. However, circumstances more of a political nature rather than economic, educational or material, prevented this body to be embodied”.

Not only the Czechs but also the Poles in Galicia had been making efforts to establish their agricultural university in Cracow. The government in Vienna agreed in 1890 and allowed the establishment of an agricultural department at the University of Cracow. This act broke the centralistic approach of the central Vienna government to higher agricultural education in the Cisleithan Regions. It was an important impulse for the Czech negotiators.

Among the Czech agrarian specialist circles there was an opinion at the break of the 19th and 20th centuries that first of all it was inevitable to establish an agricultural department at the Czech technical university in Prague, and then, as a follow-up step, to open in Prague an independent agricultural school of higher learning fully equipped with everything necessary, including a college farm. At the same time, a requirement was to start a cultural-technical specialist course (land improvement) at the Czech technical university. Land improvement issues were an important topic in some European countries in the late 19th century as they then contributed to the intensification of farm production. Such investments into the land were only at their beginning both in the Czech lands and in Austria. The Czechs called for rectifications even then as there had been a shortage of graduated specialists in the field.

Lectures in agriculture were among the optional subjects at the Czech technical university until 1890. The students in four main study courses (water and road construction engineering, civil engineering, mechanical engineering, technical chemistry) registered for the optional lectures only when they had anticipated that the knowledge thereby acquired would be useful for their future career. There was not much interest in subjects “not listed in specialist departments” and the lectures in agriculture were no exception. Professor Lambl lectured in two agricultural subjects: “General Land Management” with five weekly hours, and “Farm Administration” with four weekly hours.

The ministry of culture and education issued a regulation of 9 September 1890 saying that the four main courses at both technical universities in Prague would be supplemented with a "General Section" which was practically a three-year preparatory course for secondary technical school teachers in chemistry, descriptive geometry, physics and combinations thereof. By then, the secondary school teachers had to take a full four-year university course in the subjects. The "General Section" course reduced the compulsory teacher training time (from four years to two-three).

In the school year of 1891/92, the General Section studies were extended by a two-year course in agricultural technologies, based on the ministry of culture and education regulation of 11 November 1890. The course was extended by a year to become a three-year course from 1892. In the 'cultural-technical' department the graduates of the four basic courses could extend their education by a course in land improvement and machinery use in agriculture. The study programme of this course included two agricultural subjects, 'Farm Administration' and 'Crop Production', and these were included as compulsory subjects in the 2nd state examination. Such a course had been launched at the agricultural university in Vienna as early as in the academic year 1883/84. The establishment of the 'cultural-technical' department at both Prague technical universities would have been impossible without several years of efforts of the Land Assembly and the Agricultural Council for the Kingdom of Bohemia.

Prof. Lambl retired for good in 1897. He was the last of the professors who lectured agriculture as an encyclopaedic subject at the technical university. After his retirement the teaching staff of the Czech technical university decided to split the subject of agriculture among several disciplines with several lecturers. This key decision was supported by the negotiations at the ministry of culture and education in Vienna over the establishment of an agricultural course in Prague and its association with the Prague technical university. The talks ended in a deadlock, nevertheless in 1898 **dr. Julius Stoklasa** was appointed professor extraordinary for crop production and agri-chemistry, and he was entrusted the lectures in agricultural subjects at the agricultural-technical department. In the same year, prof. Stoklasa founded within his chair of agriculture and with the financial support of the Agricultural Council and the imperial ministry of ploughing a Research Station for Chemistry and Physiology of the Agricultural Council for the Kingdom of Bohemia. The Station's activities later split into the departments of 1) physics, chemistry and soil biology, 2) crop and animal physiology, 3) phytopathology, 4) fruit production and viticulture, 5) dairying, 6) cultivation of medicinal plants.

Later on, after the further talks over the establishment of the agricultural university in Prague failed once again, the Czech Assembly decided in 1900 to promote both the higher agricultural schools at Tábor and Děčín-Libwerda to become agricultural academies. These re-structured

institutes were to provide their students, grammar school graduates and graduates of secondary agricultural schools, with scientific education focused at the needs of practical farming. Both the schools inevitably had a school farm. However, the students from the Czech lands of both nationalities who wanted to gain top agricultural education still had to go to study in Vienna or to other universities abroad.

Following the appointment of J. Stoklasa as professor extraordinary, the ministry of culture approved the teaching of further subjects and some more specialists were appointed as private readers. Since then the students of the Czech technical university had had an opportunity to attend optional lectures in agricultural botany, phytopathology, physiology of lower animals, physiology and pathology of farm animals, dairying and farm animal hygiene, which were provided by specialists from the Czech university or from the research sphere. In 1901 J. Stoklasa was appointed ordinary professor.

The establishment of agricultural academies was not considered as satisfactory and political talks between Vienna and Prague continued over the opening of two new courses (agricultural and full-type agricultural-technical) within the Czech technical university in Prague. Among the leading negotiators were the members of the Czech Assembly in Prague and of the Imperial Council

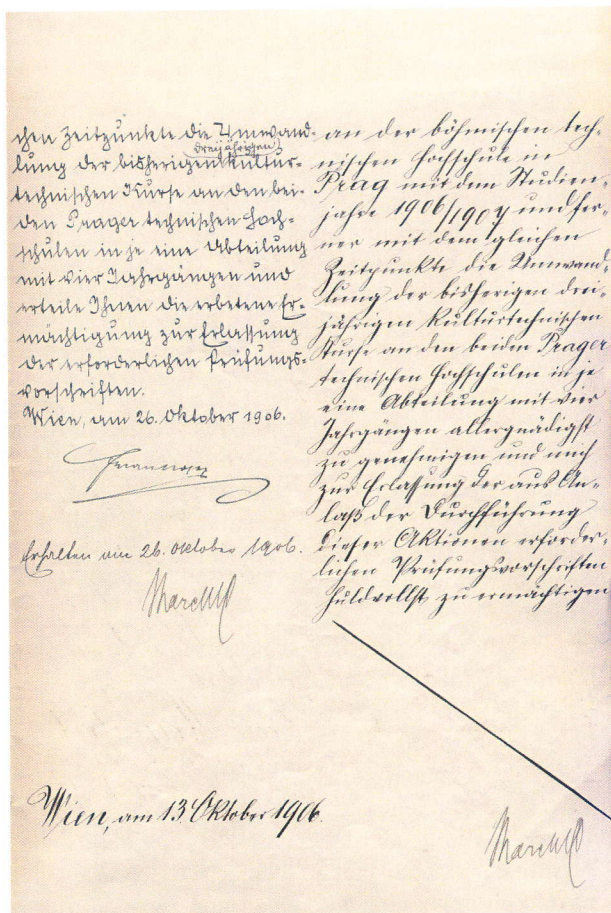


Prof. Dr. Julius Stoklasa, the first Professor for crop production and agrochemistry

in Vienna, and the representatives of the then recently founded estate-agrarian party which had the establishment of the agricultural university in Prague as one of the points of its political programme.

The National Liberal Party (Mladočeši) was not lagging behind as many of its party members were related to farming. The talks followed a ritual procedure from 1900. The members of parliament, often supported by agricultural associations and institutions, negotiated with the government who promised to start the new courses. Each time, however, the talks failed over the requirement that the Land Assembly in Prague took on a half of the personnel costs of the agricultural department. The Assembly hesitated to take such a burden on due to the poor state of the national coffers, and that was why the launch of the two courses kept to be postponed every year. In 1906 news leaked from Vienna that the two courses, so painstakingly pressed upon by the Czech side, would soon be launched in Prague. **The decision had been postponed endlessly so that the ultimate ruling of Emperor Franz Joseph I. of 26 October 1906 was received as a surprise.** Nevertheless, it came late that year, after the deadline of 15 October, when the new students of the Prague technical university had already been enrolled.

Many of the formal and informal talks were mediated by a Czech country fellow who was minister in the Vienna government. After the appointment of the new Beck cabinet in 1906, dr. Bedřich Pacák was one of the ministers. This important Czech politician had a great merit for having brought the talks on the launching of the new study courses at the Prague technical university to a



Fragment – Closing part of the Certificate of Incorporation signed by the Emperor Franz Joseph I on 26 October 1906



Greb's Villa at the Royal Vinohrady was a provisional residence of newly established Czech University of Agriculture in Prague

successful end. Among the positive circumstances was also the fact that Gustav Marchet, professor at the agricultural university in Vienna, was appointed new minister of education. The new Beck government decided that all the costs connected with the establishment and the running of the new courses would be financed solely from the sources of the state.

Agricultural studies in Prague started at the beginning of November 1906 and 48 Czech students and two foreigners (a Russian and a Pole) enrolled in the first year of the four-year course. Only graduates of grammar schools and classical schools were admitted. Secondary agricultural technical school graduates were allowed to enroll only after the declaration of independent Czechoslovak Republic, based on the government ruling of 1919, but only under the condition that the candidate passed admission examinations in Czech Language, mathematics and physics on the level of grammar school graduates.

The university staff was facing two uneasy tasks. One was to find qualified lecturers to teach agriculture subjects, and to find suitable premises for the newly established chairs and relevant institutes equipped with teaching aids and research equipment.

At the start of 1907 the staff succeeded and found for the agricultural department the area of Havlíčkovy Park in Prague-Královské Vinohrady, including the Groebe Villa and the adjacent facilities with a 2-hectare land parcel. The original project was to build two new buildings on the site near the Groebe Villa where the agricultural department would have its premises. The Havlíčkovy Park area was even visited in May 1907 by Prime Minister baron Beck and his ministers Marchet and Pacák at the occasion of the Imperial Visit of Emperor Franz Jo-

seph I. The Groebe Villa was to be a provisional resort for the agricultural department until the new buildings were built. In November 1908, however, the Beck government fell and the political changes resulted in the halting of the new buildings construction. The capacity of the Havlíčkovy Park area was insufficient and the Czech technical university had to rent other premises elsewhere. The department of agriculture was accommodated in a total of 16 buildings or their parts in Královské Vinohrady, Vršovice and even in Nové Město. The Dean's Office and several chairs with related institutes and the Chemistry and Physics Research Station were situated in the Groebe Villa itself, the premises particularly linked with the history of the agricultural department. Lectures had been taking place there until the year 1936 when the Czech technical university moved into its new premises in Prague-Dejvice.

In 1907 the staff of the Prague German technical university submitted the ministry of culture and education in Vienna a curriculum programme with a budget indicating costs of the establishment of an agricultural department at their school. The ministry, however, rejected the proposal for financial reasons. In 1909 the German technical university turned to the ministry again with a proposal to promote the German academy at Děčín-Libwerda to become an agricultural department to be associated with the university. The proposal was materialised only by the then Czechoslovak government in 1921 when the German academy at Děčín was promoted to become the faculty of agriculture of the German technical university in Prague. After WWII in 1945 the faculty ceased to exist together with the entire German technical university.



Buildings of the Technical College in Prague-Dejvice were built in 1936, and a new residence of the Faculty of Agriculture and Forest Engineering within the Czech Technical College (ČVUT) was one of the buildings



The campus of the Czech University of Agriculture in Prague-Suchdol was built in 1953–1956

In December 1908 the Land Council in Brno turned to the ministry of culture and education with a request demanding the establishment of an agricultural university even in Brno. The ministry decision of 1909 was negative. "Bearing in mind that a special agricultural department was established at high costs at the Czech technical university only recently, the request has been shelved". The Moravians applied again several times but only in 1919 the university of agriculture in Brno was founded after the academy at Tabor had been promoted to become a school of higher learning and transferred to Brno.

The agricultural department in Prague had a specific position within the centralised Czech technical university. Formally it was one of the faculties, but with its special mission it was a specific subject. The minutes of the staff meeting of the Czech technical university of 9 July 1918 stated: "Our school of higher learning in fact represents two subjects, technical and agricultural." Even the agricultural community perceived the situation in such a way. The written documents often speak of "the Higher Agricultural Learning". This specific status was also in the background of the considerations in 1918 of the restructuring of the Czech technical university thereby making the agricultural university fully independent. The organising committee recommended in January 1919 to split the technical university into two independent subjects with independent academic staff, which would have a common name, one rector and a common senate. The University of Agriculture was not then mentioned specifically.

At the professorial staff meeting of the Czech technical university on 7 October 1919 Dean prof. J. Kopecký read the statement of the staff of the agricultural department: "The agricultural department will request to be considered as an autonomous faculty in consequence of the resolution of the National Assembly, and a school of higher learning be established within the technical university." When the Czechoslovak government approved its decision concerning the new organisation of the Czech technical university in Prague, the "Agricultural and Forestry School of Higher Learning within the Czech Technical University in Prague" was listed as one of the independent faculties. Early in 1920, after years of efforts, the school acquired a farm estate at Uhříněves near Prague which facilitated the students' practical experience and research.

The independent University of Agriculture in Prague was established in 1952.

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