



Ms. Jaroslava Musilová

The History of the Buildings of the Ministry of Finance

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*Director's foreword
Personnel Department of
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The Ministry of Finance is currently housed in several buildings in Prague, each of which has its own individual character. This publication is resulting from long-term work of the author Ms. Jaroslava Musilová, provides interesting information about the architecture and history of these buildings, and the fascinating lives of two eminent personalities. The publication is accompanied by photographs, largely taken by the author herself. Graphic layout by Mr. Jiří Machonský.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Stanislav Kokoška of the Institute for Contemporary History, the nuns of the Carmel of St. Joseph in Prague, the Institute of English Maidens in Prague and Mr. Pavel Kopecký and his colleagues from the Department of Economic Administration of the Ministry of Finance, who willingly helped in the search for the required information, or allowed pictures to be taken of interiors that are not normally accessible.

If interested in more technical information on the history of the Ministry of Finance since 1918, readers can contact the staff of the Financial and Economic Information Unit.

I believe that the time spent reading this new publication will be an interesting and enjoyable experience for all readers.

Zdeňka Pikešová, MPA

The Ministry of Finance in the buildings of the former monastery in Malá Strana

After the establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia in 1918, it was necessary to create its organizational structure. The first law to be adopted was Act No. 11/1918 Coll. on the establishment of an independent state of Czechoslovakia (the author of the original text is Dr. Alois Rašín), which ensured the continuity of Austro-Hungarian law. Under Act No. 2/1918 Coll. the 12 supreme administrative authorities of the new state were established, among others, the Office of Financial Administration.

By government resolution of 18 November 1918, these authorities were renamed as ministries. It was not easy for them to find suitable premises, so it was finally decided to introduce a tax on windows. The owners of large palaces were unable to pay such a high price and had to lease their buildings to the state. The Ministry of Finance thus acquired the first floor of the Clam-Gallas Palace on Husova Street. In 1713 the palace was rebuilt into its present form at the order of the Neapolitan viceroy Jan Václav Gallas by Viennese architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach. The sculptural decoration of the Neptune fountain, the staircase and the facade are by his friend Matthias Bernard Braun.

Due to the growing activities of the ministry, some officials moved to the offices set up in the rented premises of the Voršilský Monastery (the rooms had been vacated following the closure of the German school). Later additional space was leased in the monastery building on Ostrovní Street. The ever expanding ministry was also assigned several rooms in the German theological and philosophical faculty. Finally, a house was bought on Karolíny Světlé Street.

The offices were scattered throughout several buildings, but were not very practical for running a ministry. In the spring of 1921, the Ministry of Finance managed to acquire a monastic complex of the Institute of English Maidens (it was purchased from the order for 7 million First Republic crowns). The interior of the monastery was rebuilt. The original baroque style was tastefully aligned with elements of Art Deco. Due to their location in the historical part of the city, the original appearance of the buildings was maintained.

Based on a design by architect František Roith, in 1928 the construction of two extension wings toward Dražického Square and Letenská Street was started. The main entrance with a grand entrance hall is located in the wing in Letenská Street.



Main entrance to the building from Letenská Street

A staircase with railings decorated with marble leads from both sides of the entrance hall. The cladding of the building facade is made of chalky yellow sandstone from the town of Mšeno, the walls and railings are made of Bohemian marble from Loděnice and the tiles in the lobby are made of beautiful Lochkov marble. Thus the old and new parts of the building have been basically preserved to this day.

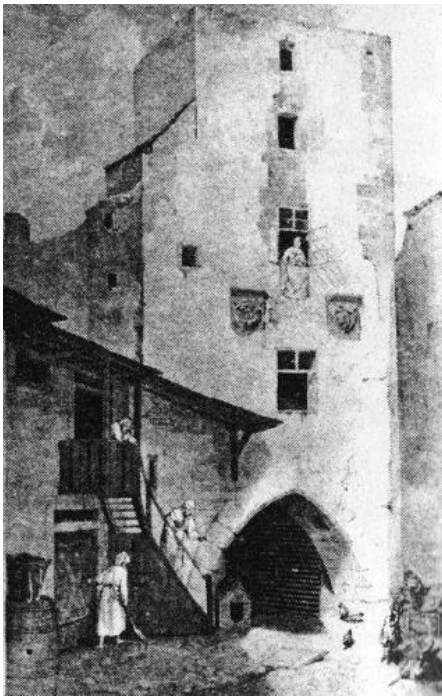


Hall in the Letenská Street wing

The older part of the building was originally built as a monastery for the Discalced Carmelites, which is why in addition to the rich history of the monastery the following pages are also devoted to the order itself.

The Bishop's Court

The Prague bishopric was founded in 973 by Prince Boleslav II. Originally Prague bishops resided in the castle next to the Cathedral of St. Vitus (in the old presbytery), the majority of which has been preserved in its original state. In 1182 the bishopric was moved to Malá Strana (the Lesser Town), probably to the fortified castle in the foreground of the Judith Bridge. The main reason for the relocation was the Church's effort to weaken its subordination to secular power. In historical sources we find the first mention of the bishop's court in 1249, but its construction was started around the second half of the 12th century.



Tower of the Bishop's Court in a wash drawing by Josef V. Hellich from 1831

In the 13th century Bishop Ondřej (1214 - 1224) ordered the bishopric to build a new large building in the late Romanesque style, which reached up to Mostecká (Bridge) Street. In the 14th century it was rebuilt in the Gothic style by Bishop Jan IV of Dražice (1301-1343). At that time, the bishop's court began to flourish. The original Romanesque building with a wooden gate was not only rebuilt, but also fortified, so it actually became a fortress. The court also included extensive gardens, whose remains are today's Vojanovy Gardens. The Court's construction was also supported by the archbishops Arnošt of Pardubice (1344 - 1364) and Jan Očko of Vlašim (1364 - 1378). The building was originally connected with the Judith Bridge, but when the bridge was destroyed by flood in 1342 it began to be oriented

more towards the Charles Bridge. This magnificent residence was apparently admired by King Wenceslas IV.

After the founding of Charles University in 1348, when an archbishopric had already been established in Prague for four years¹ the first graduation ceremonies were held here and until 1366 also most religious ceremonies. At the command of archbishop Zbyněk Zajíc of Hasenburg (1403 - 1411), the books of English reformer John Wycliffe² were burned in the courtyard on 16 July 1410, and four years later, Master Jan Hus placed his statement on the gates of the court, notifying the Catholic dignitaries that he would defend his reformist views at the Council of Constance.

During the Hussite battles in 1420 the bishop's court was burned and destroyed. The then Archbishop Konrád of Vechta (1413 - 1421) publicly avowed the Four Articles of Prague in April 1421³. From that year the Archbishop's seat remained vacant. Only after 140 years did Antonín Brus of Mohelnice become Archbishop of Prague (1561 - 1580).

The Bishop's Court thus disappeared and new buildings were erected in its place. Only one square tower in the Gothic style was preserved, now located in the courtyard of the U Tří zlatých zvonků (Three Gold Bells) house at Mostecká Street 47/16. The tower has been repaired. During the reconstruction its base was reduced to the original level. It is still possible to admire its preserved crests, decorated portals and the remains of medieval paintings.

¹ The Prague Archbishopric was founded through the efforts of Charles IV on 30 April 1344. The first Archbishop of Prague was Arnošt of Pardubice. At the same time construction of the new episcopal cathedral of St. Vitus began.

² John Wycliffe (? -1384) - English theologian at Oxford University and advocate of reforms in the Roman Catholic Church. Jan Hus was inspired by his teachings.

³ The Hussite political and doctrinal program: 1. Freedom to proclaim the word of God. 2. Communion in the same manner for all. 3. Prohibition of the reign of secular priests. 4. Punishment of the deadly sins and wrongdoers. It was adopted at the Čáslav Assembly in June 1421.

The Carmelite Order

The Order of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Carmelites) is a Catholic order founded in the 12th century. Its origin derives from the hermit brotherhood that settled in the caves at the foot of the mountain in what is now Israel. Muslims called this place the blooming garden - "El-Khader". The members of the Brotherhood were former participants of the Crusades to the Holy Land, whose order was founded in 1156 by ordained monk Bertold (himself originally a Crusader). The monk had a mystical vision in which he was ordered to gather all the hermits in the area and begin to live with them according to the ways of the prophet Elijah.

According to the Bible, the prophet Elijah was sent by the Lord to lead the people to faith in the one God. He lived the life of a hermit on Mount Carmel. Instead of this faith King Ahab⁴ and his wife Jezebel worshiped Baal⁵ and urged their subjects to the same. Elijah convinced the crowd that the drought, crop failure and famine were the result of God's wrath. He slew the pagan prophets, and after three years brought rain back to the land. People believed him and reverence for the true God was restored.

Patriarch Albert of Jerusalem created rules for hermits in 1209. They consist of 16 articles, which enjoined obedience, perseverance in prayer, poverty, preservation of sacred silence and abstinence from meat. The monastic rules were approved in 1226 by Pope Honorius III; however, Innocent IV eased the rules, because they seemed too harsh for the European conditions.

Fear of Muslims forced the monks to leave the Holy Land in 1238. They settled in Cyprus and Sicily, and later in England and southern France.

In 1631, at the foot of Mount Carmel, the Carmelite monk Prosper returned and built a monastery dedicated to St. Elijah. In 1828 it was rebuilt in its present form. In the monastery's Basilica, called "Stella Maris"

⁴ Ahab was one of the most important kings of northern Israel. He ruled from around 874-852 BC. He fortified the cities of Israel and carried out major construction work in the capital city of Samaria. He successfully fought with Syria and Assyria. His wife was the Phoenician princess Jezebel, who in Israel supported the cult of the god Baal. In the Bible, Ahab and his wife are portrayed as wicked and cruel rulers.

⁵ Baal - a Western Semitic-Phoenician god, the lord of storms and fertility.

(the English translation of the Latin name is Star of the Sea) one can see beautiful frescoes and mosaics devoted to St. Elijah.

Around 1452 the superior of the order John Soreth decided to establish a second order of Carmelites: a women's Carmelite order. It was decided that nunneries would be subject to the superior of the Carmelites of the respective province, but that also their prioresses, who were elected by the monastic chapter for a period of three years, would have a large share of power.

During its existence, the order went through bankruptcy and several attempts at reform. St. Teresa of Avila finally succeeded in restoring the original Carmelite women's order together with St. John of the Cross in the second half of the 16th century. Thus the Order of Discalced Carmelites was created.

Carmelite spiritual life is focused on deep meditation. It is based on participation in the internal life of the three persons of God. No meditative exercises are practiced, only free acceptance of God's invitation. They lead a humble and poor life, drawing strength and inspiration from the examples of the Virgin Mary and the prophet Elijah.

The first Czech Carmelite monastery was founded by Charles IV in 1347 in Prague. It includes the Church of Our Lady of the Snows, which is the tallest church building in the city. In 1351, Charles IV built another Carmelite monastery in Tachov.



Monastery and the Basilica of Stella Maris

Establishment of a female Carmelite monastery

The first impetus for the establishment of a female Carmelite monastery in Prague was given by the Discalced Carmelites as early as in 1631. Although they managed to obtain the support of the Prague nobility, the monastery was not built. The unrealized plan is only mentioned in later monastic annals.

The idea of establishing a monastery was revived by Maria Anna of Spain, wife of Ferdinand III. According to some sources, she could not get pregnant for a long time, and therefore promised that if she could give birth to a child, she would establish a Carmelite monastery in Prague. God heard her plea and on 8 September 1633 she gave birth to a son (the future Ferdinand IV). Her husband also supported the idea, but once again the monastery was not built. Pope Innocent X insisted that the newly formed women's monasteries be placed under the authority of the bishops and the Discalced Carmelites did not want to admit the weakened position of their superiors.



Maria Anna of Spain in a painting by Diego Velasquez

Apparently based on the model of her mother-in-law Empress Eleonor, Maria Anna established a large courtyard upon her arrival in Vienna. Even after her death in 1646 the strong influence of her Spanish retinue could be seen, which continued to push for the establishment of the monastery.

But this strong Spanish group failed to impress Marie Leopoldina of the Tyrol, second wife of Ferdinand III. Maria Anna's plan was taken up only after her death (in 1649 after a nearly two-year marriage) by Ferdinand's third wife, Eleonora Magdalena de Gonzaga.

Out of love for his first wife the Emperor himself offered his support. The new Pope Alexander VII, who depended on good relations with the Emperor, allowed the construction of the monastery.

The first funds were raised from the sale of the house on Malostranské Square, which was bequeathed to the project by Frebonie of Pernštejn (the last member of the Pernštejn family). The reason for the sale was the noise around the house that did not meet the spiritual nature of a Carmelite monastery. The sale raised 18,000 Meissen groschen. In 1655 Ferdinand III bought the former Wallenstein house on Josefská Street, which, after his arrival to Prague, housed the first female Carmelites led by Venerable Marie Elekta (it later had to be demolished due to poor condition). Construction of the monastery began in 1663. It was designed by the famous architect Carlo Lurago, but unfortunately almost no records of its construction have survived. In December 1671 the Carmelites moved into the unfinished building. Construction work took place even during the first half of the 18th century.

Based on the decree of Joseph II of 12 January 1782, 91 male and 20 female monasteries were closed in Bohemia. Under the Emperor's reform, only monasteries that according to him were useful to society (for example those which focused on schooling, care for the elderly and infirm or scientific activities) survived. The Carmelite order thus paid for their strong inner spirituality. Female Carmelites were allowed to live in Pohled u Německého Brodu (today's Havlíčkův Brod). After ten years they returned to Prague, where Emperor Leopold II (successor to Joseph II) gave them the former monastery of the male order of Barnabites at Hradčanská Square. Their original monastery was occupied by the congregation of English Maidens⁶ who previously resided in the Lažanský Palace on Karmelitská Street. Further construction works took place in the monastery financed from the sale of the Lažanský Palace. But they were not the last. As early as 1829 a one-story building with an attic and little shops was erected in Josefská Street and in 1869 ground

⁶ The oldest women's religious institution. It was founded by an Englishwoman named Mary Ward (1585-1645) in 1609 in the Flemish town of St. Omer. The first nuns came from England - hence the popular name "English Maidens". The founder, however, did not live to see the approval of the congregation, because its activity was unusual for that time. Its main mission is to educate in schools and to care for the elderly and infirm. They have been active in the Czech lands since 1746.

floor classrooms were built in an elevated part of the garden. In 1906, the annex with little shops was demolished and a tenement building was later built in its place.

Architectural features of the monastic buildings

The former Carmelite monastery consists of several historic buildings with the adjoining Church of St. Joseph. Southeast of the church is a cloister connecting the whole of the former nunnery and whose four wings enclose the Paradise Courtyard. The Paradise Courtyard (sometimes called the Garden of Paradise) is characteristic for monastic buildings and is meant to recall the image of heavenly paradise. It is divided by four mutually perpendicular paths into quadrants (symbolizing the cross) and in its centre there is a fountain that represents the source of life. This site has been designed for relaxation and meditation. All of the wings surrounding the Garden of Paradise have cellars whose floor plan is identical with that of the ground floor. Some walls were probably built later. Their barrel vaults have been entirely preserved. Only the outer wing cellar of the east wing, which was rebuilt during the Second World War as a shelter, is made of reinforced concrete structures.



Arcade passageway

From the windows of the rooms facing the eastern side of the cloister there is a beautiful view of the former monastery garden (today's Vojanovy Gardens). Its modernized facade is very simple. The only unusual feature is the rhythm of windows, which corresponds to the stairs. It leads to a connecting corridor with arcades. From it protrudes a slightly oblique wing that adorns the central semicircular window supposedly rebuilt by the architect F. Roith. Underneath it is a

beautiful painted sundial depicting the blessing of the monastery of Marie Elekta, probably dating back to the 17th century, photographs of which can be found in the chapter describing the Vojanovy Gardens. The wing adjoins a Renaissance house, which was adapted to the needs of the monastery.

The building is separated from Letenská Street by a wall with a beautiful metal baroque gate decorated with a roulade⁷ filled with floral motifs. Above the gate is a remarkable niche⁸ with conch-shaped decorations⁹, which now houses a baroque stone statue of the Holy Family (probably by J. A. Geiger).

In the east wing there is a very interesting vaulted room. The central dome is decorated with stucco mirrors with motifs of hanging scarves and fruit and acanthus blossoms¹⁰, which are characteristic of the decorative arts of the 17th century.



The stucco decoration of the vaulted rooms of the east wing

⁷ Infill area bounded by three straight or curved sides.

⁸ Rectangular or circular recess in the wall.

⁹ The specific type of spherical dome that forms the upper part of the niche.

¹⁰ Plastic or painted ornamental motif of leaves and tendrils of the *Acanthus mollis* (bear's breeches).

There is also an oval spiral staircase made of wood, the walls of which are decorated with conch-shaped niches. After this staircase the hall of the east wing bends sharply and continues down a passageway with arcades connecting to other parts of the monastery buildings. The two-winged north part of the corridor has two wings on the ground floor.

There is a fountain on its western edge. It consists of a stalactite plaster niche in which fossils are embedded. The fountain itself has two marble basins. The upper basin has three water spouts in the shape of angels' heads. Today the water is circulated by means of a pump, but water was originally supplied to the fountain from the slopes of the Petřín Hill.

On the ground floor of the cloister there is a preserved baroque dome, which in some adjacent rooms is decorated with stucco dating to the 17th and early 18th centuries. The first floor hallway is decorated with an early and high Baroque dome, while the vault on the second floor is again only early Baroque.



Grott's niche with fountain

In some rooms of the monastic buildings original decorations have been preserved. In the two indoor areas with beamed ceilings and painted decking, one of them is a ceiling frieze¹¹ decorated with scenes from the life of the Order. In this room there is also a bay window beautifully decorated with painted figures of Czech saints (St. Wenceslas, St. Vitus, St. Vojtěch, St. Zikmund and St. Ludmila).

¹¹ Horizontal strip on the buildings, decorated with figural, vegetable or ornamental reliefs or paintings.

Church of St. Joseph

The Church of St. Joseph was originally part of the monastery of the Discalced Carmelites. The foundation stone for the building was laid on 9 September 1673 in the presence of Emperor Leopold I, but due to lack of money and perhaps even problems with the site selection, the construction was eventually postponed.

When in 1681-1682 work began on the foundations, there was another complication. Dangerous cracks appeared on the neighbouring house owned by Prince Lobkowitz. The prince complained to the emperor, who ordered the work to stop. Lobkowitz also rejected the revised plan, according to which the church would not touch his house directly. Eventually entirely new land had to be chosen for the construction of the church, and in 1687 construction work on the current site began. The basic structure was completed in 1690, and in October 1692 the church was consecrated, although building work continued for at least another year. The decoration of the church was completed in 1702.

Most historical sources state that the church was built according to the design of P. Ignác à Jesu, whose given name was Johann Rass. However, in the drawings of Austrian architect and builder Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, which follows the plan of construction, Abraham Paris (Parigi) is named as the architect.

The tall and narrow facade of the church has a South Dutch character and is decorated with three statues. The largest of these is located in the middle and represents the church's patron, St. Joseph. On the sides there are statues of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Its Italian origin is divided into three axes (separated by embossed half-columns) and two decks. The floor plan of the temple is oval, which is characteristic for Carmelite buildings. On the sides there are chapels.

The church is surrounded by other buildings, so the lighting had to be resolved in an unconventional way. Light enters into the dome of the church most heavily on the main altar, creating in the church a special spiritual atmosphere.

The church has a very beautiful and valuable interior decoration, which involved prominent artists of the time. Petr Brandl painted the images on the main altar. The statues are the work of Matěj Václav Jäckel.

In 1735 the church was extended by two side altars - St. John of Nepomuk and St. Anne. Later there was a skylight beside the former church choir of the chapel of the monastery prioress Marie Elekta, in which her mummy was displayed for public honour.



Facade of the Church of St. Joseph

The Venerable Marie Elekta

Marie Elekta was the daughter of a poor Italian nobleman (her maiden name was Caterina Tramazzoli). She was born on 28 January 1605 in Terni. She joined the monastery of the Discalced Carmelites at the age of 21. In 1629 she was sent by the wife of Emperor Ferdinand II, Eleonora Gonzaga, along with four other nuns to Vienna to set up a new monastery. As Marie Elekta demonstrated very good organizational skills she was later entrusted with the establishment of two other female Carmelite monasteries (in Graz and Prague).



Actual reconstruction of the appearance of the Venerable Marie Elekta

Marie Elekta came to Prague in 1656 and remained there until her death. She was appointed superior of the monastery of the Discalced Carmelites in Malá Strana, responsible for the management and construction of monastic buildings. In history books she is depicted as a strong, industrious and steady woman, but it is sometimes mentioned that she cared too much about trivia. Some of the nuns accused her of being too demanding and hard, but most nuns described her as exceedingly kind and gracious.

During her stay in Prague Marie Elekta was already very ill and her condition steadily worsened. Life was made miserable by her frequent headaches, liver problems, and later even spitting blood. Eventually she became paralyzed in one leg. She died in the early hours of 11 January 1663 in her cell. Unfortunately only a few of her letters have been preserved. She burned all of her diaries before her death. According to anthropologist Emanuel Vlček, the cause of her death was acute inflammation of the lungs. Later it turned out that her death was caused by cirrhosis of the liver (the main disease that lasted more than 30 years), abdominal dropsy (ascites) and pneumonia. It is amazing how bravely and patiently she endured the pain. Her body was buried in the monastery garden under the Chapel of St. Elijah.

After three years, her body was removed from the tomb. It was said that Marie Elekta appeared to one of the nuns in a dream and told her that her body was intact in the grave and the nuns allegedly wanted to verify it. According to other sources, Elekta was exhumed because water leaked into her grave.

The body was actually found intact under the remains of garments, though it had not been mummified in any way before burial. For the nuns this was a miracle. First, they let the body dry and then they washed it with wine and herbs. As a result this gave Marie Elekta a dusky complexion. They applied vinegar compresses to correct the error, but this darkened the skin even more. Unfortunately, it could no longer be remedied.

Due to rigor mortis the nuns failed to seat Marie Elekta in a chair and straighten her head (when placing her in the coffin, which was too small for her, her neck was accidentally broken). Mother Euphrasia (then Superior of the monastery) told them to remind her of vow of obedience. When they did so, Elekta apparently raised her head and bent her knees and the nuns were able to easily seat her in the chair.

The news of this miracle spread quickly. A special commission was established to investigate it. A doctor confirmed the unusual preservation of the body. Finally, it was decided that Marie Elekta would be displayed to public tribute in the side chapel of the Church of St. Joseph.



The Venerable Marie Elekta

As a result of the church reforms of Joseph II, in 1782 the Carmelite order was abolished and the nuns had to leave Prague. They took the body of Marie Elekta, which they regarded highly, along with them. In 1792 Leopold II allowed them to return to Prague and gave them the monastery at the Church of St. Benedict in Prague Castle (the former monastery of the Barnabites). Elekta dressed in monastic garb was placed in the church, where she rests to this day. Here she survived the Communist regime, when the nuns were once again expelled from the monastery. We can see her sitting in a display case on the right side of the presbytery. People attribute her intercession to a large number of miracles.

In 2003, after 324 years, experts from the Medical Faculty of Charles University again examined the body of Marie Elekta. Although science has progressed in the meantime, the unusual preservation of her body was again confirmed.

The Vojanovy Gardens

The Vojanovy Gardens are one of the oldest Prague gardens. They cover an area of about 2.4 ha and part of their original geometrical configuration corresponding to the strict Carmelite Order has been preserved. The perimeter is enclosed by high walls and buildings, thanks to which noise does not penetrate from the surrounding streets. Visitors are most surprised by the old fruit trees, which create a unique atmosphere here that is completely different from other Prague gardens. It is pleasant to sit in the shade and think about the history of this place, which was not always so peaceful.

The garden originally was part of the garden of the Bishop's Court (later the seat of the Prague Archbishopric). During the Hussite wars in 1420 the buildings were destroyed, including the adjacent greenery. Some historical sources indicate that the trees were cut down so that Zikmund's army could not hide behind them during the battles. But the Archbishop's court was never restored and even the garden has not been preserved in its entirety. Part of it was obtained in 1421 from the Prague municipality by brewer Ondřej to enlarge his brewery, and the greater part was acquired from King Vladislav II, by burgomaster of vineyard hills Jan Pytlík and since 1573 the eastern part of the garden was even used by the butcher's guild as a slaughterhouse. Part of the land was purchased by Albrecht von Wallenstein in the early 17th century, but it was later confiscated. In 1653, Ferdinand III purchased the confiscated land and the rest of the original garden, united pieces of land and donated them to the monastery of the Discalced Carmelites.

Three chapels are still preserved here to this day: the oldest is the stalactite chapel of St. Elijah built between 1660 and 1670, whose ground plan recalls the Latin cross. The chapel is in very poor condition



The Chapel of St. Teresa of Avila

and no longer has its original interior (only five not very well done scenes from the life of St. Elijah by an unknown author are on the vault). The valuable statue of St. Joseph by Matěj Václav Jäckel is now stored in the depository of the National Gallery. The chapel is currently under reconstruction. According to the monastery's chronicles, in 1743 at the expense of Eleonore von Wallenstein the baroque chapel of Teresa of Avila was built. Other sources cite 1715 as the year of construction. The furnishings of the chapel have not been preserved. The repainted frescoes on the walls date to 1745, allegedly by Jan Karel Kovář. From the front they create the illusion of an altar, and from the side they depict scenes from the life of St. Teresa. The fresco in the dome is also a celebration of the saint. The Chapel of St. John of Nepomuk was built around the second half of the 17th century during the construction of the boundary wall arcade. It consists of two niches. The deeper one used to contain the statue of St. John of Nepomuk and the shallower one the door to the spiral staircase that leads to the terrace above the chapel. The chapel is now under reconstruction.



The sundial with the blessing of Marie Elekta

The main road leads to the staircase to the terrace at the back of the garden, which is adorned with beautiful magnolias and pergolas with benches. On the wall of one of the buildings that surround it is a sundial with a beautiful fresco depicting the blessing of the monastery by Marie Elekta. It probably dates from the second half of the 17th century and its scale is simplified leaving out the curves for

the zodiac signs of Leo, Cancer and Gemini. In the 1990s the sundial was successfully restored. During the Communist era it was deliberately obscured by trees. In 2001, during repairs to the terrace the trees were pruned. This allows visitors to the garden to once again admire the sundial.

On the terrace there is a newly restored Baroque fountain in the shape of a four-leaf clover. It was discovered accidentally during garden work in 1980. First it was supposed to be only planted with flowers, but after cleaning it turned out that it was much more beautiful than originally anticipated. Finally, it was decided that the fountain would be equipped and fitted into a seedbed. Around it were stationed benches, whose design recalls the atmosphere of English gardens.



Baroque fountain in the shape of a four-leaf clover in the back of the garden

In 1783 the convent came into the possession of the English Maidens, who in the early 19th century transformed part of the garden into an English style park with an artificial lake and ornamental trees. Some of the trees are truly remarkable (such as the ginkgo biloba, red-beech or white weeping willow), which along with the pond create magical little areas.

In the spring of 1921 the monastery complex was acquired by the Ministry of Finance. New ministry buildings were built in the southern part of the garden. The northern part was adapted by the architect Chlustina. The public garden was opened in 1954 and was named after famous Czech actor Eduard Vojan, who lived nearby.

In August 2002, the garden was destroyed by a flood, the water reaching up to nearly four metres. The repairs cost the City District of Prague 1 CZK 1.5 million and took less than half a year. After the reconstruction some parts of it are even more beautiful than before.



The pond in the front part of the garden

The Ministry of Finance during the Second World War Major General František Bürger - Bartoš

František Bürger was born on 25 November 1898 in the small village of Čertyně, where his father rented an inn. The First World War interrupted his studies at school. Like many others, he was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army, with which during the fighting he went as far as the Italian front. There he joined the Czech soldiers who voluntarily gave themselves up. This was in response to the policy of the government in Vienna, which deployed Slavic troops to the front lines of the heaviest fighting. In the fall of 1917 he joined the Revolutionary Volunteer Troops (later called the Czechoslovak Legions) with which he returned to the front in the spring of the following year. After graduating from the cadet school, he was appointed an officer on 1 December 1918 and after the war ended in 1919 he participated in the military clash of Czechoslovakia and Poland over Cieszyn (the so-called seven-day war). In 1926 he began studying at the War College in Prague, which led to a successful military career. From October 1929 he began working as head of the Hungarian section in the second (Intelligence) Department headquarters of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces and later as head of organization, mobilization and personal groups. Here he gained valuable experience which he later used in the resistance.

In 1936 he was appointed Chief of Staff of the 5th Infantry Division in České Budějovice. The start of the Second World War, however, marked the end of the Czechoslovak army and soldiers mostly reverted to civilian employment in the Protectorate. František Bürger worked at the Ministry of Finance as the counsellor of the pension department for issues of former officers of the Czechoslovak army. He secretly collaborated with General A. Eliáš, who passed reports to foreign radio. Later, he began to work with the resistance organization Obrana národa (Defending the Nation)¹². But the generals who were in charge of this organization were gradually arrested. Therefore in August 1944 he began to work independently. His goal was to establish a military headquarters that would be able to organize military action against the German occupiers. The headquarters received the code name Bartoš and as its seat was chosen the bunker of the Prague anti-

¹² This organization consisted mainly of former high-ranking officers of the Czechoslovak Army.

air-raid police in Bartolomějská Street No. 5, because it was equipped with cable, telephone and telegraph connection to all parts of Prague.

The headquarters had at its disposal six Luftschutz battalions (anti-aircraft protection police), 4,026 uniformed police officers, 425 employees of electric companies, 400 policemen, 385 members of government troops and 200 members of the former financial patrol. During the uprising, the headquarters was in charge of all the smaller components that were created during the fighting.



Military Command of the Great Prague "Bartoš" (Colonel Bürger in the middle)

The Bartoš headquarters had all the characteristics of a secret resistance organization. The members met only in carefully selected office buildings and did not address each other by military rank. In order to give the impression of a normal working relationship, the meetings were held during office hours and the members addressed each other using official or professional titles. Special care was devoted to arranging meeting places and no written records of the meetings were kept. The time was negotiated by telephone, but for security reasons, the real time of the meeting would be advanced by one hour and one day. The ideal place for secret meetings was the building of the Ministry of Finance, where F. Bürger worked. The building had three entrances, which in case of detection increased the possibility of escape. The staff of the ministry were reliable. The porters recognized

former officers by their behaviour and kept no records of their visits. During the battles themselves these command headquarters were subject to the Alex headquarters created at the end of April 1945 by General František Slunečko. Both headquarters, Alex and Bartoš, were subordinated to the Czech National Council, who represented the Czechoslovak Government and President Beneš and made its first public appearance on 5 May 1945 in the afternoon.



Military Command of the Great Prague "Bartoš" (Colonel Bürger second from the right)

The immediate impetus for the outbreak of the Prague uprising were unsubstantiated reports of the arrival of allied troops in Prague and the repeal of bilingual officialdom, bilingual signs and the ban on hanging the Czechoslovak flag. The decree abolished the protectorate government in agreement with K.H. Frank on 4 May 1945, and its aim was to pacify the situation. However, the result was quite the opposite. People spontaneously started tearing down German signs and flags, and a bitter conflict broke out in the streets of Prague. Thanks to the preparations of the resistance organizations a rebellion was organized fairly quickly. The facts of how it unfolded are well known. We are more interested in what was happening behind the scenes, especially the reasons for the signing of the protocol on the surrender of the German armed forces in Prague. It was also signed by František Bürger and this signature was the reason for his subsequent persecution.

In the spring of 1945 it was clear that the defeat of the German army was inevitable. German Minister of State K.H. Frank decided to negotiate with the Western powers via a delegation consisting of Czech politicians and industrialists. The group set out on a journey on 25 April 1945, but did not succeed in making contact with the Americans. Frank's effort to create a transitional government that would take over power in the Protectorate also did not succeed. On 6 May 1945 the Czech National Council negotiated with K.H. Frank, who eventually offered the abolition of the Protectorate and his own resignation. Deputy Representative of the Czech National Council Dr. J. Kotrlý insisted, however, on the legal continuity of the Czechoslovak Republic and declined the offer. From then on the negotiations were led by General Rudolf Toussaint (Head of the Wehrmacht).



The German delegation after the signing of the surrender (Gen. Toussaint centre)

An agreement was reached on 8 May 1945, when General Toussaint arrived at the Bartoš headquarters. The negotiations began around 11 a.m. and besides Toussaint they also included General Arthur von Briesen. At that time the situation in Prague was critical. The defenders of the city were running out of guns and ammunition and had no reports on the progress of the Red Army. German tanks and the SS were nearing the Old Town Square. This situation and concerns that the

Red Army would conduct itself similarly as in the Warsaw Uprising¹³, contributed to the fact that instead of unconditional surrender a protocol was signed to implement forms of surrender of German armed forces in Prague. In this document, Germans in particular sought to ensure safe passage into American captivity. There is a presumption that Toussaint's decision was influenced by the fact that his only son had been captured in a battle at Masaryk Railway Station.

To illustrate the situation, it is important to mention the so-called Velichovsky mission. The deployment of the mission was probably decided in Reims during the signing of the unconditional surrender of Germany¹⁴. Its aim was to end the fighting as quickly as possible. The terms of surrender were to be delivered to the staff of Army Group Centre, commanded by Field Marshal Ferdinand Schörner, by the special representative of the Wehrmacht High Command - Lt. Wilhelm Meyer-Detring. To this end, the British transported him to Plzeň and the American mission had him safely transferred to the small spa town of Velichovsky where the staff of Army Group Centre was located. The journey started on 7 May 1945 at 9:40 p.m. from Plzeň and when passing through Prague around midnight the representatives visited the Bartoš headquarters, where they were familiarized with the situation in Prague. Before leaving, they met with General Toussaint in Dejvice, who due to the surrender of Germany they tried to persuade to sign a protocol to end the fighting. General Toussaint thus found himself under great pressure.

The Protocol was signed on 8 May 1945 at 4:00 p.m. and Lieutenant Toussaint was handed over to his father. General Kutlvašr in his memoirs reveals the surprising fact that Toussaint admitted that he had been informed of the surrender of Germany. Otherwise, the participants rated the general's behaviour as correct. He revealed to them, however, that he had received a command from Field Marshal Schörner that if the situation developed adversely for the German units, Prague would be destroyed. Two hours after the signing of the

¹³ The Warsaw Uprising broke out in August 1944 in German-occupied Warsaw. It was organized by the Home Army to liberate the city before the arrival of the Red Army and establish a functioning government. It was intended to prevent Stalin from creating a Polish government made up of his supporters. Given the number of insurgents and their equipment, the uprising could not hope to succeed without outside help. However, the Red Army halted its advance and bloodily suppressed the uprising.

¹⁴ The unconditional surrender was signed on 7 May 1945 at 2:41 a.m. at the headquarters of General Eisenhower, and entered into force on 8 May from 11:01 p.m.

protocol German troops began to leave the city. According to the agreed terms, the retreating soldiers retained only light weapons. Some of the units, however, continued to fight until the arrival of the Red Army.

Opponents of the signing of the German surrender in Prague claim that its conditions allowed the German army to move into American captivity. Other sources state that by circumventing Prague the German troops were slowed down and some of them were cut off by the Red Army on their journey west. The Soviets accused the signatories of the surrender of hatching a pre-prepared plan for the rescue of German soldiers. General Kutlvašr and Captain Nechanský were even designated as enemies of the Soviet Union.

On 5 June 1945 the Minister of National Defence, General Ludvík Svoboda dismissed František Bürger as Chief of Staff of the First Army Corps. This was probably at the insistence of the Soviet Union. Along with him the other signatories to the Prague surrender were punished.

On 20 June 1945 František Bürger adopted the code name Bartoš as his surname. At the recommendation of the Military Council of the Government Presidium of 2 August 1945, František Bartoš due to his merits remained in service, but was ordered to Budapest as commander of the Czechoslovak military mission in the Allied Control Commission. After more than a year of operation he was transferred to Paris as a military attaché with the French government. Finally, in September 1948 he was appointed commander of the Supreme Military Academy. He did not work there for long either. He never gave up his pre-war ideals, which were not in line with the new Soviet methods. The audience at the Academy included informants, whose reports led to the decision of the Minister of National Defence on 28 October 1949 to send him on leave followed by retirement. Instead, he was arrested and sentenced to eight months' imprisonment and loss of military rank. After the sentence he was held until the beginning of 1953 in three forced labour camps in Pardubice, Jáchymov and Příbram.

After his release, he worked at the State Pedagogical Publishing House in Prague. On 5 November 1957 the Supreme Court acquitted him of the original indictment and he regained the rank of Major General in reserve. Five years later he suffered a stroke. He spent the rest of his life in bed, because the left side of his body was paralyzed. He died on 15 October 1964.

On Tuesday, 3 May 2005 at 1:00 p.m. in the lobby of the Ministry of Finance in Letenská Street on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia a plaque commemorating Major General František Bürger-Bartoš was unveiled.



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance B. Sobotka, M. Opletalová, daughter and J. Opletal, grandson of František Bürger-Bartoš

The best way to finish this chapter is with an excerpt from a speech by František Bürger, with which in June 1945 he bid farewell to the officers who worked with him during the war at the Ministry of Finance:

"The Ministry of Finance accepted the former officers and military personnel with an understanding for their situation - not material but moral. They had seemingly lost the goal of their life - without wronging others. They felt completely accepted and among comrades. In times of persecution they enjoyed its protection, as far as was possible. In matters of support the members acted above and beyond the call of duty, unless they were hampered by collaborators and fellow travellers, who today have been vigorously eradicated from their ranks. Our activities in the Ministry of Finance were only half official - most of the time was spent fulfilling military obligations to the nation. In this we had the full understanding of civil servants, willingly and without hesitation, even though the object and purpose were concealed from them. In 1944-1945 we worked openly to cover activities and to help the soldiers. There were no cases of renunciation, weakness or betrayal by any high-ranking official, finance officer or clerk. The Ministry of Finance hid us for six years in

its system, here at the headquarters as well as in subordinate offices, and for six years it hid the Czechoslovak national emblem carved on the facade of its building under an innocent surface. In the days of fighting, it provided shelter and assistance to the Bartoš air unit. I thank you on behalf of all my fellows for your efforts in fulfilling your duty to the fatherland and the nation!"

The History of the Building at Legerova 1581/69

The building of the Ministry of Finance stands on the corner of Legerova and Čelakovského streets at the site of the original residential house that stood here until 1936. The neighbouring apartment building on Legerova Street belonged to Mr. Viktor Novotny (now the hotel Down Town); an adjoining house in Čelakovský Street belonged to František Baloun (the former hotel Neptun, now the seat of a foreign company).



The original house in a photo dating to the 1930s

After the demolition of the house in 1937, the company Českomoravská stavební a.s. built a classic apartment building for Mrs. Josefína Osersová designed by architect Mr. Rudolf Bisler. The building was designed as a home for the upper classes; each apartment also had a separate maid's room. The designer of the building's technical equipment (pumping stations, transformer stations, ironing, central heating) was Mr. Rudolf Winternitz. The installation of a three-person elevator with a capacity of 225 kg was carried out by ČKD a.s.

The building had its own source of drinking water: a well with a diameter of 1.1 m.



Illustration of a design in a photograph from 1936

In the 1950s it was the home of the Regional Military and Accommodation Administration for Prague, which assigned the apartments in the building to the families of senior officers. At that time a first stage electronic fire alarm was installed here. At the

beginning of the 1980s the building contained a total of 30 apartments. Since 1982, the building was shared by the Design Institute of Transport and Engineering Constructions, which in May 1992 was privatized and transformed into a joint-stock company.

In 2001 the building was transferred to the state and was delegated to the Ministry of Finance. It is located in the historic district of Vinohrady, Žižkov and Vršovice, and therefore is protected pursuant to the Decree of Prague No. 10/1993, which must be taken into account during all reconstruction and maintenance work. For example, when replacing windows special wooden frames have to be used whose shape and width faithfully simulate the original.

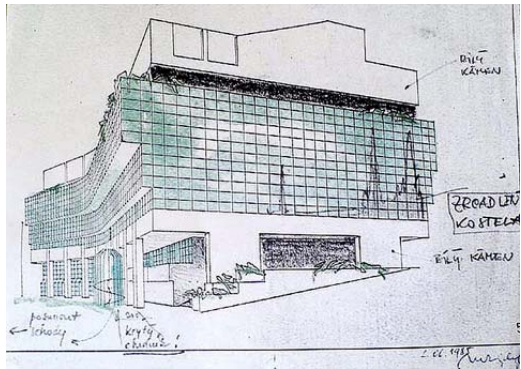
Also noteworthy is the beautiful view from the windows of some offices of the greenery in Čelakovského Park, designed by the landscape architect František Thomayer on the site of demolished city walls. Due to the construction of the metro and highway, the area of the park will be reduced and divided into two parts. It boasts about 30 species of trees, the largest being the small-leaved lime trees and *Sophora japonica*. In 1933 a statue was unveiled of legendary actress Otýlie Sklenářová-Malá by sculptor Ladislav Šaloun.



Contemporary photographs of the building

The History of the Building at Janovského 438/2

A competition for the construction of the building was announced in 1975 and was won by architect Milan Rejchl from the Prague Design Institute. From 1981 to 1985 at the request of the investor the design was reconceived into a second and later a third final version. The blueprints were made by the company Keramoprojekt. The building permit was issued on 31 July 1986, and permission to use the building for technical spaces on 29 December 1992.



The second version of Milan Rejchl's design

The building was originally used as an ICT centre for the State Planning Commission, which was housed in the adjacent building (now the Town Hall of Prague 7). It should contain high-capacity computer technology. With the transition to a market economy, the Commission was abolished and after final approval (22 February 1993) the Consolidation Bank was moved into the building. The activities of the bank ended on 31 August 2001 and its legal successor as of 1 September 2001 pursuant to Act No. 239/2001 Coll. was the Czech Consolidation Agency. After more than six years of activity, on 31 December 2007 the Czech Consolidation Agency ceased to exist and its legal successor as of 1 January 2008 was the State represented by the Ministry of Finance, to which all rights and obligations of the Agency were transferred.

The building has five floors. An interesting architectural feature is the increase in the area of the floors in height. The supporting structure of the building consists of a steel skeleton. Inside is a five-storey hall. In one of its marble galleries there is a model of the Ariane rocket (a rocket by the European Space Agency designed to carry satellites into orbit). The building is one of the first energy-efficient buildings. Its copper roof with an area of 620 m² is essentially the predecessor of today's solar flat-plate collectors.



Contemporary photographs of the building

On Friday, 10 December 2010 Ministers of the European Union approved the decision of Ambassadors of the Member States of the European Union to move the administrative part of the Galileo navigation system to Prague. Twenty-two ambassadors voted for Prague at the meeting. Its biggest competitor, the Dutch project Noordwijk, only received four votes.

Czech Republic offered the European Union to lease two floors of the building on Janovská Street under very favourable conditions. For the first five years it will pay only a symbolic fee of one euro per month, and afterwards discounted market rent. There were some modifications, in particular the reconstruction of the convention hall and technical upgrades to match current requirements.

The Galileo program is aimed at building a global navigation satellite system that will be under civilian control. It should ensure independence for Europe from the American GPS and Russian Glonass systems. The costs are estimated at 3.5 billion euro, making it so far the most expensive joint project of the European Union. So far two of the planned 30 satellites (27 operational and three backup) are in orbit. Full operation was originally planned for 2010, but is now expected in 2014.

The relocation of the administrative part of the Galileo project to Prague is more than a matter of prestige for the Czech Republic. According to experts, it could mean a great advantage in maintaining the country's competitiveness, as space research is a very promising field. Czech companies could more easily participate in the development of applications for the system and its users. In addition to Radio Free Europe, it is another important international institution based in the Czech capital.

The History of the Building at Voctářova 2145/9-11

The founder of the construction was České loděnice, a. s., which has been active on the market since the 19th century. It is known as a traditional manufacturer of cargo ships, engineering vessels and floating equipment. The company acquired the building decision on 9 March 1987 and the building permit more than a year later, on 10 June 1988. The architect of the project is design company IDOP, Olomouc. Originally the building was used as a dormitory with a canteen. In 1989 it was doubtful whether the building would ever be finished, but it was finally completed on 30 June 1992.



Contemporary photographs of the building

Even after 1989, the building was owned by České loděnice, but it gradually sold it to the Poštovní banka company (later Investiční a poštovní banka). After the collapse of Investiční a poštovní banka, on 19 June 2000 all of its assets and liabilities were taken over by the Czechoslovak Trade Bank (ČSOB) through the purchase of the company. ČSOB owned the property for a long time. In the fall of 2001 it became the property of the Czech Consolidation Agency and several months later under Government Resolution No. 286 of 18 March 2002 the government approved a free transfer to the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry began to remodel the building, but in August 2002 the building was hit by floods. The archive was flooded, and since the same fate beset the archive in the Prague 8 district, hardly any documents about the building have been preserved.

At that time part of the property was leased to the Directorate General of Customs for its Customs Technical Laboratory (CTL), which was equipped with very valuable instruments. During the night of 12 and 13 August, laboratory workers moved expensive equipment, computer technology and the most important documents from the ground floor part of the laboratory to the upper floors of the building.

Thanks to their dedication, most of the equipment and documents were saved. Later the water in the ground floor reached up to the ceiling. After the floods the building structure was examined and the building was declared safe and structurally sound; however, several gaps and cracks in the interior walls appeared. The flooding and partial destruction of the laboratories sped up the construction of new buildings for the Customs Technical Laboratories, for which plans have already been prepared. This time a safe place in Prague 4 was chosen - far from the river. After completion in 2004, the customs laboratory moved.

If funds permit, the Ministry will continue even after the floods in the reconstruction of the building. Great attention is paid to energy efficiency. In addition to thermal insulation of roofs, windows were replaced and thermal insulation of external walls is being prepared.

The building is architecturally interesting. It was designed in the shape of a ship, which will forever be a reminder of its first owner. It has six floors and two entrances, each with its own address. The building is registered as one building in the cadastral register. In this area property rights to land are very complicated. In 2005 it was discovered that the building is standing on third-party land. The then Finance Minister Bohuslav Sobotka decided to settle the ownership. Negotiations with the owner of the neighbouring property were initiated, which proposed to swap the parking lot near the water for the two half ruined buildings with plots that belonged to the Ministry building. In addition there was to be a fee of CZK 300,000. However, the Ministry commissioned an estimate of the property and managed to obtain an additional payment of CZK 21 million.

Thanks to the interest of developers the area around the building is being transformed. For example, on the site of today's Libeň docks the construction of luxury apartments, offices and shops is being planned. The dead end channel of the Vltava River will be cleaned up and on its banks a dock for small boats up to 20 metres will be built. The banks of the river are slowly gaining a modern metropolitan look, but are losing their original nostalgic charm.

The History of the Building at Lazarská 15/7

The original building was owned by a mining and metallurgical company founded in 1905 as the Austrian Mining and Smelting Company based in Vienna. After the fall of Austria-Hungary it moved to Brno, which was conveniently close to the North Moravian industrial areas. Because of its connection to the Czechoslovak arms industry, its significance for the newly formed state was not only economic but also strategic.



Contemporary photographs of the building

Given that Prague became an important trading centre, about seven years later it was decided that the company would move to Prague, where they would build their own building. First two buildings were bought on the corner of Jungmanova and Lazarská streets and later another building on the corner of Lazarská and Vladislavova streets was acquired. A competition for the design was won by architect J.K. Říha. In his functionalist approach the building has simple and specific shapes; unnecessary complexity has been replaced by geometric purity. The architectural design provides plenty of light and air and allows easy communication between each part of the building. The interiors of the building were designed by architect Bohumír František Antonín Čermák.

The original buildings were demolished in 1928 and in July of the same year the foundations were excavated. In the autumn it was already possible to lay the concrete, which was delayed due to the severe winter. The steel structure was made in the structural steel works in Karlova Hut' and its assembly took four and a half months. The structure rests on a concrete base. The ceilings are made of thick-walled hollow bricks. All internal glazed partitions and walls of steel are coated with white bronze. The floors were covered with linoleum. The street side of the building was equipped with double-glazed windows to shield employees from the noise of the street. On the other side the windows are only single-glazed. The ground floor and

mezzanine floor was lined with light brown Bavarian Waldstein granite. For the facade of the lobby, hall, main staircase (up to the sixth floor) and passages were used milky white Calacatta marble from Italy with irregular grey or black patterns from the famous Carrara quarry. The passage leads to a type of Arabescato - fine white marble with dark grey veining, whose shapes resemble ironwork. Parts of the tiles on the stairs in the lobby of the former Burian Theatre are spectacular Lipovský black marble, which comes from the Jesenicko region in Silesia. The tiling is beautifully in harmony with the functionalist simplicity of the building.

The central area is formed by the main staircase with elevators. Lobbies on each floor serve as waiting rooms. The shape of the adjacent corridors with the offices is rectangular (in one corner rounded). On the sides there are two emergency staircases, which originally served as access to leased offices, guest rooms, studios and laundries. All rooms on the mezzanine, ground floor and basement were intended for lease.

Until the fall of 2012 the basement housed the Divadlo Komedie (Comedy Theatre), whose predecessor was the famous Vlasta Burian Theatre. The well-known comedian founded his own theatre in September 1925 in the Adria on Wenceslas Square. In 1928 he moved to the Švandovo Theatre in Smíchov and in December 1930 to the Palace of the Mining and Metallurgical Company. The theatre prospered. Vlasta Burian ordered



Divadlo Komedie

the construction of a foyer, studio, fashion house and workshops. The space even housed the Vlasta Cinema, which screened Burian's films as well as silent and sound comedies. The theatre played host to many famous Czech actors, such as Jaroslav Marvan, Jindřich Plachta, Věra Ferbasová and Čeněk Šlégl. From 1 September 1944, when Reich Minister for Propaganda Goebbels closed all theatres, the theatre was left abandoned. After the war ended in May 1945, the theatre was nationalized and renamed the Theatre of Collective Creation. Vlasta Burian never returned. In 1990 the theatre was renovated and most of the

original equipment was destroyed. In the autumn of 2011 Divadlo company.cz won a tender to be the new operator of the Divadlo Komedie (Comedy Theatre) and in October 2012 started its first season.

In the second basement of the building there is a beautiful fencing hall, which was until recently the only fencing club in the Czech Republic designed in the same project (today there is also the SC Prague fencing centre in the new hall of the Avion Sports Centre in Prague 9). It was brought about by former Deputy Director of the Mining and Metallurgical Company Dr. Jan Tille, who was an active member of the Riegel First Czech Fencing Club and was supported by designer and architect Josef Říha, who was also a member of the club. The Riegel Fencing Club moved here from the Municipal Assembly in 1930. The technical equipment of the fencing club was at that time at a high level, but much of this equipment has unfortunately not survived due to later reconstruction. The room was lined with travertine and in addition to the fencing club a club lounge, locker rooms with showers and a small pool were established here. The trophies of members of the club still decorate the hall. And the fencing room is currently fully operational.

The paternoster lift by the ČKD company was built in 1932. At that time, the building had been in operation for two years. Originally it only travelled to the seventh floor and had 16 cabins with a maximum load of 160 kg. In 2002, it underwent a complete renovation conducted by the KONE company. The entire electrical system was replaced, the cabin was restored and the elevator began riding up to the eighth floor.

After the Second World War, the Mining and Metallurgical Company was forced into receivership and was subsequently nationalized. The building on Lazarská Street gradually became the seat of several state institutions (e.g. the Ministry of National Defence, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of State Property Management and Privatization). In 1996, the building was taken over by the Ministry of Finance. Since the beginning of 2010 it houses the General Financial Directorate, but part of the space is still used by the Ministry of Finance.

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