



30 Years of AIMA

Lednice 1996

National Museum of Agriculture in Prague

Section Valtice

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Establishment and initial development of International Association of Agricultural Museums

Zdeněk Tempír

Evolution before 2nd world war

International organisation of agricultural museums was being prepared already at the end of 1920's and in 1930's of 20th century. The International Association of Agricultural Museums itself, however, has not been founded until 1966 on the first international conference of agricultural museums which took place for the occasion of 75th anniversary of establishment of Czech (Czechoslovak) Agricultural Museum in Prague. Many employees from various institutions that were related to agrarian history and employees who recognised the need to educate wider public took part on the goal of creating an international organisation dealing with agricultural museum activities and on the establishment and initial development of International Association of Agricultural Museums. The aim of this endeavour has been from the start to bring attention to the importance of agriculture, to the changes in agriculture that happened especially in 19th and 20ies century, to the need to explain development of agriculture and world community based on new facts and findings from various related fields, and to promote understanding of these changes – main development trends including the upcoming support of the people in the interest of the whole society.

The significance of agriculture, in other words the basic relation of human and soil, its cultivation and exploitation for the very existence of society has been stressed by agrarian movement which spread through Europe at the end of 19th century and especially after famine and suffering caused to many common people during W.W.I. The soil and its cultivation, i. e. agriculture can be seen more clearly and better understood as a prerequisite and basis of the existence of communities, nations and countries.

"Liberalism and socialism go through difficult crisis in the flow of modern times, whose requirements are different from their programme. The times of agrarianism are coming. The times of man returning to timeless laws of soil, which are unalienable and to which humankind time and again runs in the times of the most difficult trials and painful disappointments", wrote and said in his speeches Antonín Švehla, prime minister of the Czechoslovak government (1922 – 1929) and Republican Party of Agricultural and Farming People, and, during 1918 – 1924 also the first chairman of the Club of Czech (Czechoslovak) Agricultural Museum – Institution for Studying and Advancement of the Countryside. 1) In the 1920's the representatives of Agrarian Party were recognising the increasing need and necessity of international collaboration in agriculture. Through action of Mr. Švehla, International Agrarian Bureau had been established in Prague in the mid 1920's; this Bureau published an information bulletin first in Czech and French, and later in German, too. Farmers from neighbour countries, and also from France, The Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Yugoslavia and Scandinavian countries applied for co-operation. In autumn of 1927 Mr. Švehla proposed, instead of free information exchange, to found International Agrarian Bureau in the organisation of agrarian parties with the aim to deepen the information flow and collaboration in agrarian policies and mutual understanding. Mr. Švehla was very ill when he was elected chairman of new international agricultural organisation in 1928. His goals and ideas were, however, maintained until the W.W.II. 2)

The idea of international collaboration had been of course alive also in the circle of Agriculture Museum creators, where close associates and friends of Mr. Švehla worked, especially Dr. Josef Kazimour (1881-1933), long-time agent of Club of Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum and after him agent Ing. Dr. Eduard Reich (1885-1943). An attention to the need of international organisation of agriculture museums and establishment of united work rules was drawn by Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum at XV. International Agricultural Congress which took place in Prague in 1931. Mr. J. Kazimour gave detailed account of the structure and goals of agriculture museum activity in Czechoslovakia and he underlined the usefulness of agreement about mutual contacts and work. 3)

In this period Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum gathered information and materials about agricultural museums, their structures, activities, equipment, size, and programmes. Many of these museums were visited by professional employees of the museum and members of Museum Club on various occasions. The most important role in gathering information about foreign agriculture museums and agricultural museum activities in the broad sense played Ing. F. Šach, Ing. et Dr. h. c. Jan Frič, Ing. A. Špička, Ing. Dr. techn. N. Pume, Ing. M. Jurkovič and Ing. Dr. tech. E. Reich. An overview has been made by F. Šach and published in inquiry about agricultural museum activities in Czechoslovakia (see No. 1).

A proposal for international co-operation in agricultural museum activity was made by E. Reich, agent of Club of Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum, at the meeting of International Fédération Internationale de la Presse Agricola, International Workshop of Librarians and Presidium of International Federation of University Educated Farmers (FITA – Fédération Internationale des Techniciens Agronomes) in 1937 in Berlin. FIPA President – Dr. Ing. Feisst from Switzerland, who was presiding the conference, keenly recommended the proposal for approval, declared its realisation to be a

pressing requirement of international agricultural policy and in the name of the presidium promised that the proposal will be discussed on the nearest meeting. 4) E. Reich then detailed and discussed the accepted proposal in the beginning of 1938 on the committee meetings of FITA and FIPA in Switzerland.

E. Reich in his proposal presented more arguments for the establishment of international federation of agricultural museums. He stressed that these museums of various types lack mutual work contact, thus hurting themselves as well as others. He underlined the exceptional importance of agricultural museums as cultural institutions founded on scientific basis and often being important centres of agriculture progress and effective propaganda, bringing profit to its nation and in the international contact possibly to the world agriculture as well. He saw the importance of world museums in their collaboration with modern science and in help that it gives to science by employing old literature, other sources and by initiating and enabling study of the history of agriculture. He reminded of the need to solve many problems of study of agriculture history with participation of the whole groups of countries, and similarly of their interpretation in museum expositions. He also saw the co-operation of agricultural museums as beneficial to learn about work towards world peace (1937!). He also considered technical aspects of the work in agricultural museums. As a precondition of starting the activity he proposed detailed research of the state of agricultural museums and its organisation in all the countries. In the next part he presented an overview of agricultural museum activities in Czechoslovakia, its organisation structure, programme, and work methods.

The administration committee of Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum which met on 16th September of 1937 reacted with pleasure to the proposal of E. Reich to build an international organisation and co-operation in agricultural museum activity, and decided, probably in view of overall international situation and also the raising of the building at Praha-Letná, that arrangement of the first congress of agricultural museums in Czechoslovakia will be considered later. 5) W.W.II. prevented continuing work on the proposed organisation. Many agricultural museums in Europe were either destroyed or damaged. Museums in Warsaw, Petersburg and Berlin disappeared altogether. Museums in Budapest, Bratislava and also in Bohemia were damaged.

Initial evolution

At the beginning of second half of 20th century new agricultural museums appeared – 1951 Reading, England, 1953, Wels, Austria, 1961 Erfurt, Germany, 163 Alt Schwerin, Germany, 1964 Szreniawa, Poland etc., apparently as a result of ever faster changes in agricultural production and way of life on the countryside. An effort was promoted to archive these changes and disappearing phenomena and save the documentation about them for the future need of society. The development of agricultural museums was also supported by development of agricultural history, agrarian ethnography and sociology and of course also other similar sciences. Some branches of agricultural and forest sciences needed to know better their own science and its development in the past. Also some practical needs led to an increased interest in agricultural tools. In 1954 a conference about cultivation tools took place in Copenhagen, and International Secretariat for Research on the History of Agricultural Implements was established. In the same year a conference in Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum at Kačina castle about agricultural museums took place, and general director of Hungarian Agricultural Museum F. Szabó and general director of Slovak Museum M. Jurkovič took part on this conference. Contacts were being established and more regular meetings of workers from museums, universities and other research institutes were happening. Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum was visited by a group of Danish ethnographers led by A. Steensberg, B. Bratanič from Yugoslavia, researchers from Poland, Germany, the Netherlands and other European countries. In the end of 1950's we at Agricultural Museum started to gather more systematically information about agricultural museums and related institutions, but political situation was not favourable for arranging an international conference about agricultural museums (Cold war, 1956 Soviet invasion in Hungary etc.). Since the beginning of 1960's Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum again started contacts with Hungarian Agricultural Museum. Both directors of these museums – Ing. Dr. K. Čermák and Dr. J. Matolcsi were in favour of this conference, however, they were postponing it. Hungarian Agricultural Museum started to prepare an archive of historical agricultural tools in 1962. It arranged conference in Budapest in 1964 on this subject, whereas apart from museum workers also several agrarian ethnographers took part (for instance W. Jacobeit from Berlin). Workers from similar institutions and branches were meeting more often during mostly private, but sometimes also work visits.

Establishment of AIMA

In 1960's relatively more favourable political atmosphere appeared, and therefore Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum after a preliminary agreement with Hungarian Agricultural Museum and of course with some workers at central Czechoslovak authorities – Ministry of agriculture and Forest Management, Education and Culture Ministry and agricultural research and the circle of museum workers, agrarian historians and ethnographers, proposed to arrange I.

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international conference of agricultural museums for the occasion of 75th anniversary of its establishment. The conference under a name of CIMA I (I Congressus Internationalis musaeorum agriculturae) took place on 11-14 October of 1966 at Liblice castle near Prague, the castle served as the house of science workers of Czech Academy of Sciences. Excursions to the main workplace of the museum at Kačina castle, to extensive archaeological research of Neolithic agricultural settlement in Bylany near Kutná Hora, to two large agricultural companies (co-operative farm and state farm) and to several historically interesting towns was also part of this conference.

78 workers from museums, universities, scientific institutions and other workplaces took part in the conference. Thirty participants were from abroad – France, the Netherlands, both German states, former Yugoslavia, Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, Austria and Sweden. The programme was based mostly on the aims and ideas of workers of Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum from the times before the W. W. II, though no one explicitly (and purposely) did not mention it. 6) The goal of the conference was to evaluate the development tendencies of agricultural museums, to help solve questions of museum documentation and scientific compilation of agricultural development, and to define possibilities of international co-operation of agricultural museums. The conference was organised from the viewpoint of agricultural history so as to suit the needs of workers of agricultural museums and other institutions dealing with agricultural history. Therefore an attention was concentrated on bringing together people from main integration circles. Workers from museums, agricultural historians from schools, institutions, archives, agrarian ethnographers and agronomists and foresters concentrating on history in their narrower fields were at the conference. This basic aim was also implemented for drafting of further conferences. Thus the first 1966 conference was visited by researchers intensively dealing with history of agricultural management (Slicher van Bath, Janoušek, Lom, Wellmann, Berthold, Křivka, Pátek, Peters, Zytkowicz), agrarian ethnographers (Jacobeit, Balassa, Jest, Kramařík, Kunz, Markuš, Trathnigg), development of historical ploughshares and ploughs (Bratanič, Kothe, Šach), forest history (Hošek, Nožička, Urgela), museum science (Andreska, Barbarits, Beneš, Franz, Matolcsi, Paweski, Strzemski and others), retrospective bibliography and manuscript literature (Bednařík, Lazecký, Štřesková, Šmelhaus, Takács), history of technology (Hupfauer, Gergelyi, Kuttelvošer and others), iconography of agricultural and forest activities (Kreuzberg, Navrátil), history of domestic animals breeding, including veterinarian care (Matolcsi, Krasnikov, Loudil), plant growing history (Bachtejev, Lůžek, Tempír), historical agrarian sociology (Bouza, Kutnar, Kodedová) and questions of agro-legal problems (Tlapák) or weights and measures (Honc) and development of agricultural systems of management (Hoffmann, Košťál and others).

There were eight expert meeting altogether, presided by prof. B. Bratanič, Dr. J. Matolcsi, prof. H. B. Slicher van Bath, Dr. G. Trathnigg, prof. M. Hupfauer, prof. L. Zytkowicz and prof. G. Franz. The final meeting was presided by prof. R. Berthold. F. Jeschke related on this meeting previously prepared and discussed proposal of Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum to found an international organisation of agricultural museums. 7)

The meeting concluded that preparation committee with secretariat in Prague should be created. The committee was elected in the following composition: Z. Tempír (chairman), V. Šmelhaus (secretary) – both from Czechoslovakia, on recommendation of Slicher van Bath from Wageningen, the Netherlands, I. M. G. Van der Poel, J. Matolcsi and I. Balassa from Hungary, R. Berthold from former GDR, G. Franz from Stuttgart-Hohenheim, G. Trathnigg from Wels, Austria, A. S. Krasnikov from Moscow and A. Eskeröd from Stockholm.

The purpose of the committee was to prepare statute and programme of the organisation, to present it to the participants of the conference and to other agricultural museums, to discuss possible incorporation of this organisation into ICOM or FAO and to prepare a second international conference of agricultural museums – CIMA II in 1969. The place of the next conference was to be chosen between Germany (FRG), the Netherlands and Sweden, according to subsequent agreement and possibilities. A proposal of J. Matolcsi was accepted to arrange CIMA III on the occasion of 75th anniversary of establishment of Hungarian Agricultural Museum in 1971 in Budapest. 8) Acta Musaeorum Agriculturae was accepted as information bulletin of agricultural museums, this bulletin was prepared by Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum and the first double-issue was published already at the 1966 conference. Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum promised that it will be issuing this bulletin and spread it to people from agricultural museums and similar institutions and corresponding collaborators. It was expected that the activity will be at first concentrated on the European countries and only later according to the needs and possibilities to other continents.

In the next term the status of the association was prepared. The preparation was conducted by Z. Tempír and V. Šmelhaus from Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum, J. Görner from State Central Archive in Prague and G. Franz from Agricultural University in Hohenheim. After numerous discussions and clarification of possibilities and needs of the association, IAMA (AIMA) was accepted on the 25th meeting of executive committee of ICOM on 28/7/1968 in Köln am Rhein as affiliated organisation (organisation affiliée, organisation membre). The executive committee of ICOM was at the time presided by anthropologist Dr. Jan Jelínek from Brno.

Additional activity of AIMA

During the past thirty years there were eleven conferences of International Association of Agricultural Museums. After the first conference in Czechoslovakia in 1966 the second conference took place in Agricultural Museum of the

Agricultural University in Hohenheim (Stuttgart) in 1969. The third, very successful conference was in 1971 in Hungarian Agricultural Museum in Budapest on the occasion of above mentioned 75th anniversary of establishment of the Museum. CIMA IV, i. e. the fourth conference of the Association was, after a somewhat complicated period, arranged in 1976 in Museum of Rural Life in Reading, UK, 5th conference presided by W. Jacobeit in 1978 in Neubrandenburg, former GDR. CIMA VI was arranged by Nordiska Museet in Stockholm, or Julita-Gaard in Sweden in 1981, and in 1984 the 7th conference took place in Paris (Saint Riquier). Colleagues from Hungarian Agricultural Museum prepared 8th conference of AIMA in 1987 as the second one in Budapest. In 1989 the 9th conference AIMA took place in one of the oldest agricultural museums in the world, in Danish Agricultural Museum, which thus actually commemorated 100th anniversary of its establishment (1888-1988) as well as building of new expositions, depositories and other objects in Randers in the new quarters of the museum. CIMA X, anniversary 10th conference was also a success of development of agricultural museums in Italy. Trento was the place of the conference in 1992. In the temporary period of generations exchange the preparation and arrangement of 11th conference was undertaken by Slovak Agricultural Museum in Nitra in 1995. The next conference CIMA XII is being prepared by Polish Muzeum Narodowe Rolnictwa in Szreniawa near Poznan. This museum that was founded after W.W.II continues the tradition of the agricultural museum destroyed during the W.W.II. The 12th conference will be arranged in 1998.

Since 1966, when Czechoslovak Agricultural Museum started to publish Bulletin of agricultural museums – AMA, 21 issues till 1990 (1988) were published, totalling more than 2500 pages. It mostly contained reports from AIMA conferences, but also other articles, studies and contributions. We did not yet succeed in publishing materials from the 9th conference in Trento (1992) and Nitra (1995). Editorial preparation was in the past conducted by Z. Tempír, V. Šmelhaus, then J. Tlapák, again Z. Tempír and in the final period also J. Rychlík. The help of editorial councils since the 1970's was very valuable asset. When during 1988 and 1989 it became clear that there will be some financial and organisational problems in publishing AMA, it was proposed that reports from the conference would be published in the country arranging the conference, and more easily and cheaply produced information paper AMA – News would serve as information bulletin. It was expected that it would be issued irregularly, mostly 2-3 times a year. Issues No. 1 and 2 were published in 1989, other two, also prepared, were not published.

The International Association of Agricultural Museums – AIMA – doubtless enabled, initiated and supported through its activity the development of agricultural museums and the agricultural history in many countries. Notwithstanding difficult problems in the divided world of yesterday it was possible to establish and uphold contacts with similar institutions and expand personal contacts in many particular branches. AIMA helped to develop the activity of work groups in many fields. I would like to mention paleoethnobotanics, paleoethnozologists, the question related to the development of agricultural implements, the museum documentation of agricultural development and rural way of life. Many exhibition exchanges were organised during past years. The activity of AIMA benefited the development of agricultural museums in many directions, inspired solution of some questions of agricultural history, presentation of significance and functions of agriculture and forestry, especially regarding nutrition, environment functions, enlargement of knowledge about agriculture development in particular regions and so on.

International Association of Agricultural Museums (AIMA) can no doubt contribute also in the future to the development of museums and agricultural history and especially the agriculture itself, which is the basis on which today's civilisation rests.

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