



JOSEFA KŘÍŽKOVÁ NÁPRSTKOVÁ, BENEFACTRESS OF THE MUSEUM¹

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ABSTRACT: 2013 was the anniversary both of the founding of the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures and of the birth of Josefa Náprstková, the wife of Vojta Náprstek. Although she started out as an ordinary maid without any great education, after her husband's death Josefa took over the running of the museum and its public library, and above all managed to acquire interesting exhibits for the museum from literally all over the world. In total, she presented the museum with over 6,000 artefacts, and mediated countless gifts. She also founded an extensive display of traditional lace and embroidery. Although many of her donations were transferred to other museums when the collections were divided up in the 1940s, the Náprstek Museum continued to hold items documenting the journeys of leading Czech travellers (Josef Kořenský, Enrique Stanko Vráz, Otokar Feistmantel, Josef Wünsch, Martin z Lány and others).

KEY WORDS: Josefa Náprstková (1838–1907) – Náprstek Museum – Czech Industrial Museum – collection items – American Club of Ladies – travellers.

In 2013 we commemorate the 175th anniversary of the birth of Josefa Křížková Náprstková, whose life and work are closely connected with the Náprstek Museum. The museum was founded in 1873 thanks to a generous bequest from Anna Fingerhutová, and we are thus celebrating 130 years of its existence. Her son, Vojta Náprstek, envisioned an industrial museum, but his wife Josefa gave it the form of an industrial arts and ethnographic museum with her gifts. Josefa Náprstková had such a fundamental influence on the shape of the museum that it is worth drawing attention to her achievements.

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Josefa Křížková was born in 1838 in Zlatá (now Náprstkova) street in Prague's first district. Her father, Adolf, was a distiller at U Halánků, the brewery and still-house belonging to Anna Fingerhutová on Betlémské náměstí, while her mother was a concierge and maid who made extra money by selling yeast from door to door. Josefa was the eldest child in the family, with three younger brothers and a younger sister.³ After leaving elementary school she stayed at home, helping her mother with her work as a maid and with her selling.

At the age of eighteen she went into service in Anna Fingerhutová's household, working in the storeroom and later in the liquor shop. Although she lived across the street, she only went home during her time off on Sunday afternoons. Otherwise she spent from morning to evening in the storeroom, then helping in the bar room until midnight. It was demanding work, but Josefa was happy to be earning money and helping her parents.

In 1858 Anna Fingerhutová's youngest son, Vojta Náprstek, returned from ten years in exile in America. Josefa was fascinated by him, although he paid more attention to her younger sister, Barbora, who often used to visit her father and sister. When Vojta started to hold regular parties for Czech patriots, Josefa would help him, and would clean up, although she was meant to work in the firm rather than the household. Under Vojta's influence she rapidly grew intellectually, becoming a conscious patriot. She went to the theatre (something that Anna Fingerhutová encouraged her employees to do), read Czech books and went to patriotic balls. Two years later, her sister having shown a preference for the Prague publisher František Šimáček, Josefa's long relationship with the son of her employer began. Josefa, commonly known as Pepička, had boundless admiration for Vojta, and helped him with all his activities – parties, lectures and building a public library. Under his influence, and funded by him, she took private English lessons, and started to help him with his correspondence, going on to manage it entirely; she acted as his secretary until the end of his life.

In 1862, during a visit to the Great Exhibition in London, a group of Czech patriots⁴ decided to found an industrial museum in Prague. Vojta Náprstek and Antonín Frič bought the first exhibits for it during their visit. Because Náprstek was the only one with suitable storage space (in his mother's still-house) the exhibits were kept in the U Halánků building. The group tried to establish at least a Society for the Creation of an Industrial Museum, but they were unable to do so – neither the police nor the ministry would give permission. Meanwhile, Vojta continued to purchase and accept exhibits for the future museum.

In 1865 the American Club of Ladies was set up at U Halánků, under Náprstek's tutelage. Among its founding members was Josefa Křížková. To her numerous activities she thus added another, although her heavy workload meant she was only able to devote a limited amount of time to it. Nevertheless, she was among those members who were always there at important events, and were pillars of the club. She diligently attended specialist lectures, read a large amount, and went on trips and excursions. Her natural intelligence grew, as can be seen most of all from her diaries. The early entries were often confused, full of spelling mistakes and essentially unintelligible to

³ Josefa (1838–1907), Emil (1840–1863), Čeněk (1841–1893), Barbora Ludmila (1844–1879), Jindřich (1843–1863). Emil and Jindřich were typographers, Čeněk studied medicine and became chief doctor at the City Infirmary.

⁴ František Ladislav Rieger, Dušan Vilém Lambl, Karel František Kořistka, Jan Krejčí, Antonín Frič etc.

the unenlightened reader. The later entries, however, have a certain narrative value, and the memoir-style writings of the 1890s are continuous texts with a distinct style. She was definitely helped in this by her experience in managing Náprstek's correspondence, her social contacts and her close friendships with several members of the American Club of Ladies, with whom she corresponded prolifically for many years.



Fig. 1: Max Švabinský, Vojta Náprstek and his wife Josefa. Pen and ink drawing, 1898.
Náprstek inventory collection, N.00.690.

Her love for Náprstek and her admiration for his ideas led her to support and help him in his daring plans, often against the will of his own family. One of Náprstek's biggest ideas was the founding of an industrial museum, something for which he lacked finance, however. Until his mother's death he was reliant on her contributions, which were only just enough to buy books and magazines for the library. It was her death, and above all her will, that allowed Vojta to realise his dream – in which Josefa's help was inevitable. A year later the museum was opened to the public in temporary premises at U Halánků, with three sections – household technology, gifts from travellers to non-European regions in particular, and objects of applied art from Asia.⁵

As has already been indicated, the museum's collections grew partly through Vojta's purchases and partly as the result of gifts from travellers and Czechs living abroad. Not all of them had a precise idea of what an industrial museum should collect, however, and so large numbers of disparate objects piled up at U Halánků.

⁵ The non-European areas were documented by gifts from, among others, Dr. Emil Holub from South Africa, Dr. P. Durdík and F. Czurda from the Pacific. The oriental exhibits consisted of Náprstek's purchases both through commercial companies and travellers such as J. Kořenský.

The death of Vojta's mother meant not only that he could take actual steps to found the museum, but also allowed him to legalise his long-lasting relationship with Pepička by marrying her. His mother had been fundamentally against the match, but Vojta nevertheless found in Pepička a devoted and loyal companion and colleague, who took on his opinions and identified with his plans. Her work for the museum became her lifelong mission, although on top of it she had to manage the running of the still-house, bringing up their adopted children and work in several associations.

It is incredible that a woman with her education and experience became the founder of an independent display entitled „The Work of Our Mothers.“ There is a rumour regarding the beginnings of the great collection, namely that in 1877 an old woman once brought some bottles into the liquor shop to be filled up (it was very common for people to bring their own bottles). The bottles were wrapped in old pieces of material to prevent them from breaking, and Pepička realised that the textiles could well be rare pieces that should be kept in the museum. She exchanged the pieces of material for others, and the pieces thus acquired turned out to be the crown of a woman's cap, embroidered using a knot technique. On the other hand there is written evidence stating: *I hereby declare that in 1877 I was permitted by Mr. Vojtěch Náprstek to visit my father in Horky near Bakov, where I found part of a cap that had belonged to my mother. I brought it to Prague and showed it to Mrs. Josefa Náprstková. Mrs. Náprstková mended the part of the cap, and sent it to the Industrial Museum at U Halánků in Prague. Marie Jirátová née Holubova.* The truth may lie somewhere in the middle, but either way it was with this piece that Josefa founded an extensive collection of traditional embroidery and lace from all over Europe. The American Club of Ladies also helped to collect suitable exhibits, and together with Josefa they wrote to their acquaintances outside Prague, above all teachers and small-town intellectuals. Together they thus created a unique collection, which was meant to help people learn about traditional art, but also to nourish aesthetic sentiment. Examples of embroidery and lace were traced on to paper and lent to schools for the teaching of handcrafts. One example was also lent to the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893.⁶

Josefa not only concerned herself with the acquisition of new exhibits for the museum, but made sure that they were properly stored. When Náprstek moved the collections to a new exhibition building in the 1880s, it suddenly became clear that the display rooms would not be large enough. It is interesting that this had been revealed by Jan Neruda in an essay written while the building was still under construction.⁷ When he died in 1894, Náprstek thus left the museum overcrowded. Although Josefa was literally paralysed for several months after her husband's death, in the end she returned to looking after the museum and to her active role in the American Club of Ladies. She decided to enlarge her husband's museum by adding an extra building, and to ask the city hall for permission for a new street to be created behind the museum, which would ensure that the surrounding buildings did not overshadow the museum building. It was several years before the authorities permitted the demolition of the old Boršov building, the creation of the street U Dobřenských and the alteration of the museum building. It took a large amount of nerves and money, but everything

⁶ Among the evidence of success is the large diploma which the Náprstek Museum received for this loan of over two hundred pieces of embroidery. The collection, which represents Slavonic countries in particular extremely well, was then given to the local ethnographic museum.

⁷ Jan Neruda, Prague, 1 June 1878. *Národní Listy* 2. 6. 1878.

turned out well in the end. In 1901 the building was finished, and Josefa, together with Josef Kottner and his wife Barbora,⁸ moved the museum's exhibits into it and put them in order.

After her husband's death Josefa also ensured, in her correspondence with Czechs in America in particular, that they were made aware that the museum and library were still receiving donations. In December 1895 she even issued an appeal in the press. Addressing them as: *Most dear and esteemed countrymen!* she suggested to Czechs living in the United States that, on the model of Prague, an American "Vojta Náprstek" curatorium should be created in Chicago in order to collect exhibits from all the states of America for the Náprstek Museum. The appeal was printed in expatriate Czech newspapers at the start of 1897, and soon the Chicago daily *Svornost* carried a reaction. It proposed that in settlements with Czech immigrants, two volunteers should be delegated, whose task it would be to collect objects for the museum and then forward them to the centre, which would be in Cleveland, Chicago, or in another large city. Items to be collected would include books, magazines, photographs, maps and new inventions. It was also suggested that objects from the American natural world be sent. The records of the items in the collections of both the library and museum show that Josefa Náprstek's appeal had a considerable effect. The museum thus received thousands of exhibits, from individuals, organisations and schools.

A similar initiative took place in 1898, when Josefa Náprstková, together with Jan Třeščík,⁹ drummed up a collection of exhibits for the Náprstek Museum from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Josefa had printed an *Approximate List of Objects Suitable for the Aims of the Envisaged Collection*, which in the name of the Czech Colony in Sarajevo was distributed to many localities with Czech emigrés. The articles that were to be collected were traditional everyday objects, items of clothing and women's handicrafts, as well as gems and weapons. This appeal, too, met with a good response, and the museum gained dozens of new, mostly three-dimensional exhibits from Bosnian and Herzegovinian manufacturers.

While Josefa was unable to entirely replace her husband, being above all lacking in the social charm with which Vojta had gained friends and donors, she made up for it by a notable tenacity and perseverance. She continued to look after the library and museum with undiminished vigour. If she was in need of funds, she always made sure to go and ask for them at lunch time, since it was her firm belief that people would meet her request quickly so they could have a quiet lunch. This tactic appears to have paid off, and she always managed to achieve what she set out to do.

Advertising also helped to swell the museum's collections. Both Náprstek and his wife after him would put advertisements in the daily papers listing donations, often with a description of the gift and the name of the donor. In 1898 Josefa even managed to have the new exhibits (gained during that year) photographed, and she then sent the photographs to the donors by way of thanks with text: *with many thanks from the Náprstek house for remembering us, your grateful Josefa Náprstková*. It was a very clever advertising move, which pleased the donors and let them know that every further gift would be received with gratitude.

⁸ The Kottners lived in the U Halánků building; Josef Kottner was the first administrator of Náprstek's collections, and later the director. Barbora Kottnerová helped Josefa take care of the museum, and her daughter Ludmila was Náprstek's librarian.

⁹ Jan Třeščík taught in a technical school in Sarajevo, and was also a major figure in the local Czech association.



Fig. 2: Gifts to the Náprstek Museum in 1898. This photograph was sent by Josefa Náprstková as thanks for the gifts donated to the museum. Photo NpM 183.0366.

The museum's relatively large number of donors and supporters resulted, among other things, in a certain amount of envy on the part of the Ethnographic Museum, which had developed handsomely after the Czecho-Slavonic Ethnographic Exhibition, but had then started to stagnate. Its director, František A. Šubrt, had even proposed via Lubor Niederle in 1896 that the Náprstek Museum join with the Ethnographic Museum, because in part they collected the same type of objects. Josefa refused the idea in no uncertain terms, believing it to be something entirely unthinkable and an insult to her husband's memory. Šubrt and Niederle were probably not expecting such a fierce rejection. They made no further such offers, and even apologised. Even during Náprstek's life, the Czech Industrial Museum had not been strictly industrial. More and more it came to hold gifts and purchases of ethnographic objects, which were seen by both Náprstek and his wife Josefa as the „primitive“ artefacts of technical inventors. At the end of the 19th century, technical progress was incredibly fast in all branches of science and manufacturing, and it was not humanly possible to buy and exhibit what was „most modern.“ As a result, the number of technical objects in the museum's displays stagnated, while the number of ethnographic and applied art objects grew.

It was one of the museum's great advantages that Vojta Náprstek managed to enthruse enough of his friends to support the museum, and they provided funds for the purchase of the collections. The funds were banked, and the interest then allowed exhibits for the museum to be bought every year after Náprstek's death (from, for example, Alois Kašpar from Simferopol, František Řehoř from Galicia, Martin z Lány from Africa and others). Josefa herself lived on the proceeds of the rent from the still-

house, since she put all her funds into the renovation of the museum. After the death of its founder, the museum was officially (from 1895) run by a curatorium¹⁰, but in practical terms Josefa had the last word. Until her death in 1907 it was she who, to all intents and purposes, managed the museum and decided on its acquisitions.

The curatorium managed a foundation, and thus took decisions on matters such as the lease of the building U černého orla (At the Black Eagle) on Na Poříčí street (no. 1072-II). Although in 1898 there were plans to turn the building into a hotel¹¹, the cost was more than the curatorium could afford, and the plans were never realised. The curatorium did all it could to obtain funds to finance the running of the museum and the purchase of new exhibits. The Black Eagle building consisted of flats and an inn, and the rent that it brought in was highly welcome for the curatorium. The biggest drain on funds took place at the turn of the century, when the curatorium bought part of a building lot behind the Náprstek Museum, on which it was planned to build. Without a loan and donations from supporters, it would not have happened. It was fortunate that the curatorium's other members, in addition to Josefa Náprstková, included Josef Kottner, Renata Tyršová and Josef Scheiner, all people for whom the museum was dear to their hearts. In all their reports and requests for financial support they always mention the educational character of the museum and its unique collection. They often include statistics regarding gifts and purchases in the past year, from which it can be seen that the museum was gaining large numbers of objects, and, gratifyingly, ones of a very high quality. During the museum's beginnings, its acquisition activity had often been random and lacking in concept, but from the 1890s onwards it can be seen that the museum was collecting objects on a programmatic basis.

A good overview of the museum collections is provided by the inventory books, with lists of all the exhibits gradually acquired.¹² Since, in addition to a description of the object, they also give the name of the donor, we have an excellent overview of who gave or sold what to the Náprstek Museum. Besides those of Vojta Náprstek and his wife, the most frequently-appearing names are those of the American Club of Ladies¹³, Mr. and Mrs. Kottner, leading Czech travellers (Emil Holub, Josef Kořenský, Enrique Stanko Vráz, Otokar Feistmantel, Josef Wunsch etc.) and also Czechs who had settled abroad and who mediated donations or purchases of exhibits for the museum (the Korbel brothers, Karel Jonáš from the USA, Josef Kareš from Bremen, František Řehoř from Galicia etc.) One of the Náprstek Museum's biggest donors was Josefa Náprstková, who not only bought things in the Czech lands, but also mediated donations and purchases from literally all over the world. The first record of one of her donations is from 1873, when the museum was founded through the bequest of Anna

¹⁰ The curatorium of the Czech Industrial Museum had twelve members. It was headed by the mayor of Prague. There were always four women represented (including Josefa Náprstková for life), three members of the city council and five elected members.

¹¹ The building At the Black Eagle was part of Vojta Náprstek's inheritance from Anna Fingerhutová, and Náprstek included it in the foundation's assets. From 1913 the site of the building At the Black Eagle has been occupied by the Hotel Imperial.

¹² The Acquisitions Books, which cover the period when Vojta Náprstek and his wife Josefa were in charge, are five in total (1873–1913).

¹³ The American Club of Ladies, the first women's educational organization in the Czech lands, was founded in 1865 under the patronage of Vojta Náprstek. In addition to educational and charitable activity, it supported Náprstek's initiatives, which in practice meant, among other things, supervising and arranging visits to the Czech Industrial Museum and library.

Fingerhutová, but practically speaking it was not until the following year that it was opened to the public. From 1878 the number of Josefa's gifts to the museum rapidly rises, and from the overview a marked interest can be seen from 1879 onwards in traditional textiles and lace items from Bohemia, Moravia and Upper Hungary. In terms of numbers, women's bonnets, aprons and headscarves predominated, with pieces of lace, embroidery and embroidery patterns also numerous. The most frequently-donated items aside from textiles were vessels (glass, ceramic, majolica, porcelain, tin, brass and natural materials) toys and trinkets, jewellery and accessories (hairpins, fans, combs, watches, rosaries, purses and so on) and also metal items (metal fittings, clasps, keys, locks and railings) pictures and old prayerbooks. To a lesser extent, the donations include objects documenting events (commemorative medals, badges etc.) and, exceptionally, objects that originally formed the mainstay of the museum's collection – household gadgets (in 1905, for example, Josefa gave the museum a *Poultry plucker, a new patent kitchen tool*).

From the lists we can see that she made payments for imported items to Otokar Feistmantel, Pavel Durdík, Julius Zeyer, Josef Kořenský, Enrique Stanko Vráz, Zdenka Braunerová, Eduard Tauer, Anna Bayerová and many others. Josefa purchased items on her occasional travels (in 1877, for example, on her delayed honeymoon to Austria),



Fig. 3: A case covered in matt leather, with embossed gold ornamentation, lined inside in white moiré rep. Made by A. M. Liška, Prague bookbinder and accessories maker, as a gift to Josefa Náprstková for her 60th birthday in 1898. Náprstek inventory collection, N.00.928. Photo by Jiří Vaněk.

at exhibitions, from the estates of deceased people (in 1905, for example, she bought 230 musical boxes and pocket watches from the estate of Josef Mráček) in the shop „The City of Paris“ in Prague (a shop that sold all manner of curiosities; in 1855 she bought *a couple of vases from the treasure and digs of Dr. Schliemann – fake*) or on chance occasions (in 1900 she bought objects from Ceylon from Carl Hagenbeck jr., when he visited Prague with a menagerie and natives).

In one of her diaries Josefa Náprstková describes the museum as her own child, literally the only child that makes her happy.¹⁴ It is interesting that the museum received gifts from her every year on Christmas Eve, and also on the anniversary of Náprstek’s birthday (17 April). After her husband’s death there was no shortage, among the museum’s Christmas presents, of Chinese and Japanese items, because these were among the founder’s favourites.¹⁵

The following table shows the numbers of gifts from Josefa Náprstková to the Czech Industrial Museum (in other words, today’s Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures). The list does not include joint gifts by Vojta and Josefa Náprstek, only those where Josefa is clearly named as the donor. The data in brackets comprises gifts including objects from František Řehoř from Galicia. These objects are recorded in the inventory books under his name, but from the correspondence (kept in the archive of the Náprstek Museum) it can be seen that Josefa Náprstková refunded Řehoř’s expenses (with the exception of the last donation, which was financed from the foundation’s money and is not listed in the table). It is also important to remember that the number of donations does not correspond to the number of items. It is also worth adding that the list concerns only three-dimensional items and not donations to the library (books, magazines, photographs, stereoscopic pictures, graphic art, posters, postcards etc.) which were also extremely numerous.

Year	Number of gifts (by acquisition numbers)
1873	1
1874	1
1875	1
1876	3
1877	11
1878	247
1879	149
1880	388
1881	117
1882	204
1883	139
1884	244
1885	197
1886	451
1887	495
1888	162 (163)
1889	252 (494)
1890	109 (148)
1891	154 (173)
1892	274 (545)
1893	90 (129)
1894	84 (89)
1895	144 (232)
1896	191 (194)
1897	93
1898	103
1899	57 (114)
1900	238
1901	211
1902	128
1903	99
1904	190
1905	279
1906	94
1907	4
Total	5.595 (6.349)

¹⁴ Josefa Náprstková brought up a total of five orphan girls, but her experiences had not been good, and so she was clearly most devoted to the museum.

¹⁵ The first exhibition to open in 1874 in the U Halánků building consisted of three rooms: America, Africa and China and Japan.

The table shows that Josefa Náprstková enriched the museum's collections to the tune of at least six thousand objects, but it is likely that the actual number was several thousand higher. She subordinated all her needs to buying objects for the library and museum, and herself lived in very modest style. Indeed, she was often the butt of jokes because of her clothes, which were very well-patched, and for her strange, old-fashioned bonnets. Her prime concern was for the welfare and flourishing of the museum, however, and what she wore was of little interest to her.

In addition to the objects that entered the museum through donations or purchases mediated by Josefa, the Náprstek Museum still contains objects that belonged to Josefa herself, and which after her death became part of the collection in the „Náprstek inventory“. This is the inventory of a collection that comprised above all personal items belonging to the Náprstek family and objects commemorating the brewing and distilling activity at U Halánků, such as furniture, clothing, jewellery, kitchen equipment and travel souvenirs.¹⁶

It is sad that over two thirds of the exhibits that Josefa carefully collected for the museum over the course of thirty four years were, in the 1940s, dispersed around several institutions. Today they can scarcely all be found. The frequently insensitive division of the museum's collections according to character and origin¹⁷ thus brought an end to one major stage in the development of the museum, which instead of an industrial museum became an ethnographic one. However, Josefa Křížková Náprstková's appeal to potential donors is still relevant today: *Although it is good to keep such objects at home, they are nevertheless safer and more secure when kept in the Czech Industrial Museum. All those with a feeling for the good of the nation should give or lend such objects to this institution, so that they may be kept here for foreigners to admire and for locals to refine their taste and to learn about their national art.*¹⁸

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Přírůstkové knihy Českého průmyslového muzea, 1873 – 1913 (5 vol.), NpM

¹⁶ The collection of Náprstek's inventory numbers over two thousand objects, and also includes pictures, graphic art, photographs and daguerreotypes.

¹⁷ The technical exhibits were largely transferred to the National Technical Museum during the Second World War, while the historical artefacts went to the History Museum and the Slavonic ethnographic items to the Ethnographic Department of the National Museum.

¹⁸ On the 60th birthday of Josefa Náprstková. In: Český lid VIII, 1898, pp. 81 – 84.