

Exhibition J.A. Comenius: Education for All in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

By: Markéta Pánková

In March 2017 celebrations took place in the town of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, marking the 275th anniversary of the founding of the Moravian College, and at the same time of the town itself, the centre of which this school has become. It is one of the oldest higher education institutions in the United States and was one of just a few which had women as its students. Czech Reformation and exiles from the Czech Lands stood at the start of the history of this college. They had settled in Lusatian Herrnhut from where they took voyages to overseas with the purpose of missionary activities. The Moravian church which derives its origin from ideals of Jan Hus and Jan Amos Comenius brought the latter personality to mind by an exhibition entitled *Education for All. The Legacy of J.A. Comenius to the World*. The exhibition was prepared by the National Comenius Museum and Library of Education in Prague (further NPMK) and was installed in Payne Gallery in the centre of a large protected historical Moravian College campus between March, 16 – April, 16 2017. The Comenius Academic Club, seated in New York City, and the Historical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences acted as co-organizers of the event. Representatives of the Pardubice University, Pro-Rector, Professor Petr Vorel and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Professor Karel Rýdl provided helpful hands, too.

The festive ceremony (on March 16th) was opened at the US part by Moravian College President, Bryon L. Grigsby and Chairman of the Comenius Academic Club in New York City, Professor Karel Raška. The Comenius Academic Club is a civic association of scientists and intellectuals of Czech and Slovak origins living in foreign countries¹. Raška said that intelligentia in small countries had often been forced to emigration for religious, racial or political reasons, and pointed out that as soon as in the 17th century, J.A. Comenius could serve as an example of such an exile. Raška also mentioned a long-standing tradition in cooperation between the Moravian College and Czech cultural organizations.

For NPMK PhDr. Markéta Pánková addressed the ceremony explaining the goal and contents of the exhibition. She stressed that Comenius was one of those personalities who by his educational reform influenced several generations and had become the founder of modern pedagogy. The whole world respects Comenius not only due to his reforms in the sphere of

¹ The list of members is at the disposal on the internet (www.ComeniusAcademicClub.org), the majority of them are members of the Learned Society association of the Czech Republic, different national Academies and laureates of significant academic awards and state distinctions of the Czech Republic, the USA, Canada and the UK.

schools, but also due to his reforms and plans how to make the world better and fight the evil. According to him, the key prerequisite for improving the society was education for all. Dr. Pánková noted, that for the first time in the USA, this exhibition took place in Bohemian National Hall in New York City in 2015. On this occasion, Director Pánková awarded president Bryon L. Grigsby and his deputy, vice-president Carole Reese with J.A. Comenius Medals for the development and the spreading of Comenius's legacy abroad². Then, Professor Jaroslav Pánek's ordered lecture *The Legacy of J.A. Comenius to the World* followed. Regarding the extent of the theme within a limited period of time, professor Pánek focused on the interpretation of Comenius's most significant work, "*De rerum humanarum emendatione Consultatio catholica*" and on those Comenius's ideals which are unusually topical in the present-time all-world crisis (the problems of power and its abuse, war and peace, truth and stupid lie, international relations in general etc.). The lecture was accepted with great interest as there were reactions from both president Grigsby and American historians and art historians present in the hall. Part and parcel of the exhibition was also the presentation of Prof. Petr Vorel's book (*Monetary Circulation in Central Europe at the Beginning of the Early Modern Age*), Markéta Pánková's book (*Comenius in Us*) and international journal *Comenius* published by the *Comenius Academic Club* scientific association. Dr. Pánková then presented her new book *J.A. Comenius in Czech and World Creative Arts*, which she donated to the Moravian College library, as the book brings information about Bethlehem and also the Comenius statue in front of the college building. The opening ceremony was also visited by a representative of the general consulate of the Czech Republic in New York City, Karel Smékal.

The visit to Bethlehem has not only enabled seeing unique historical items in the college spaces, but also studying resources and literature in *Moravian Archives*. The archives of the Moravian church are an exceptionally rich source of the history of exiles and their successors in the Czech Lands, who had scattered around the world carrying-out missionary services in many countries (one of them being a continual monumental edition of *Bethlehem Diaries* published since the mid 18th century). Part of the archive library is literature enabling to study themes dealt with by books and journals published in the USA (for instance *The Journal of Moravian History*, which has been published since 2001 and under editor-in-chief Paul Peucker it is devoted to the history of the Moravian church's work around the world). This literature, little known here, is devoted with remarkable consistency to the Czech Reformation and its fate

² Vice-president Carole Reese prepared an educational program on Comenius for pupils and students in Bethlehem. The exhibition was visited by some 400 pupils and students.

in the 15th – 17th centuries, which puts it into a wider context of historical Bohemian studies abroad. Cooperation has been established with the staff of *Moravian Archives*, namely with its director, Dr. Paul Peucker³, whom the Comenius Museum in Prague sent the facsimile *Musica* by Jan Blahoslav, facsimile edition from the year 1569.

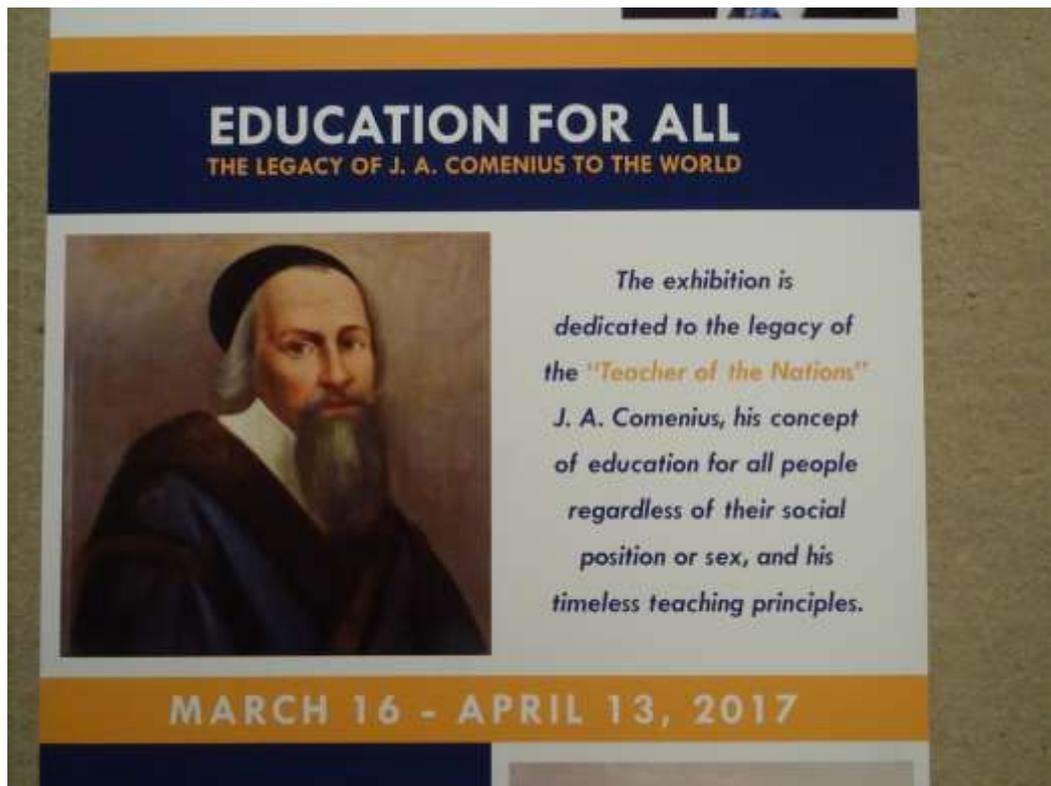
After the venture, organized to mark the Moravian College celebrations, the exhibition was via the managerial staff handed over under the custody of Professor Raška for further installations. So far the Czech Center in Houston, Texas (through the Czech Republic's Embassy in Washington) has shown interest.

For Czech scholars and Comeniologist, the town of Bethlehem is also interesting because of owning one of three existing copies of a Comenius statue which stands in front of the Moravian College. It was made by Vincenc Makovský, an outstanding Czech sculptor. The first copy is placed in the town of Uherský Brod, Czech Republic, the second in Naarden, the Netherlands, and the third one in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA. Bethlehem received the statue from Charles University in Prague in 1960. In October 1991 it was formally re-unveiled by president Václav Havel during his official visit to the Moravian College.



The Comenius statue by Vincenc Makovský is placed in front of the Comenius Hall of the Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA. A photo of this statue is also to be found in M. Pánková's book.

³ Director, Moravian Archives, 41 W. Locus St., Bethlehem, PA 18018, USA



From the left: Karel Raška and Petr Vorel in the middle of the exhibition J.A. Comenius: Education for All



From the left: Markéta Pánková, Bryon Grigsby, his wife



Jaroslav Pánek during his address in Payene Gallery



Carole Reese with the Comenius Medal from National Comenius Museum and Library of Education (Medal designed by: Igor Kitzberger)



From the left: Karel Rýdl and Petr Vorel (Pardubice University), Markéta Pánková