

American Friends of Versailles Study Marie Antoinette's Hapsburg Legacy in Prague, Part II

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American Friends of Versailles on the terrace of Strahov Monastery Library overlooking Prague.

SOCIAL HISTORY • BY: SHARON HOGE

Marie Antoinette was born a Hapsburg and during her childhood Prague was the seat of power of Bohemia, part of the Austrian empire. For the American Friends of Versailles who support restoration projects at the palace, this year's annual heritage tour to Vienna and Prague was an opportunity to study the region which had shaped her. After four days visiting sites of the queen's childhood in Vienna ([click here for Part I](#)) we boarded a comfortable coach for the five-hour ride to the capital city of the Czech Republic.



Picturesque Prague.



Many of Prague's historic buildings have been preserved.

Pausing en route we stopped in Cesky Krumlov a charming medieval village, one of the country's 23 UNESCO heritage sites. After touring the historic streets and dining in the restored dining room of the Rose Hotel which built in the 16th century as a Jesuit monastery and university, we were treated to a visit to the city's remarkable 18th-century Baroque Castle Theater, a correlation to the theater **Marie Antoinette** commissioned near the Petit Trianon and which was recently restored at Versailles.

Remarkably well preserved, the theater in Cesky retains many of the original sets, costumes, and machines which were shown to us by **Pavel Slavko** who supervises the restoration.



Cesky Krumlov is a UNESCO Heritage site.

David Wiggins overlooking Cesky Krumlov.

Mihele Fieschi-Fouan and John Parkerson.

Cesky Krumlov's Baroque Castle Theater is preserved from the 18th century.

L. to r.: Pavel Slavko described the theater's restoration process; Michele Fieschi-Fouan.

Stage settings from the 18th century are still in use.

Authentic costumes date back to the 18th century.

The AFV heritage trips are arranged by **Princesse Beatrice Bourbon Deux Siciles**, a descendant of Marie Antoinette's sister **Maria Carolina** and tours are enhanced by visits to her relatives and friends.

Our first night in Prague she was guest of honor at a dinner given in the Archbishop's Palace by **Cardinal Dominik Duka, Archbishop of Prague**. A survivor of communist imprisonment, Cardinal Duka is a merry prelate who greeted us along with **Pavel Smutny**, president of the Bohemian Heritage Fund. We were seated at one long table to savor trout fillet followed by pork tenderloin prepared "sous-vide." Little rounds of carrot cake topped off the meal.

Archbishop Duka welcomed us to dinner at the palace.

Keith Crow and Robert Arnold.

Archbishop Duka toasted honoree Princesse Beatrice.

The Archbishop was a jovial host.

Over the next two days we visited several of Prague's historic sites and palaces. A private ride in an antique tram car delivered us to Czernin Palais where we had a conference session with then Minister of Foreign Affairs **Jakub Kulhanek**. Acquired for the foreign ministry in 1934, the apartment features private quarters of former ministers including an early 20th-century bathroom. In 1948, it was below the bathroom window several stories down that popular Foreign Minister **Jan Masaryk** was found, purportedly a “suicide” just days after installation of the communist regime.

An antique tram was chartered to take us uphill.

Jacquine Arnold, Elizabeth Parker Crow, Anne Lantry, Jim Hanson, and Josée Nadeau.

David Hamilton and Claire Dwoskin.

Conference session at the Czech foreign ministry.

Michele Fieschi-Fouan, Baron Roland de l'Espee, Princesse Beatrice, Foreign Minister Jakub Kulhánek, and President of the Bohemian Heritage Fund Pavel Smutny.

Dinner at the Buquoy Palace with French Ambassador **Alexis Dutertré** was an opportunity to see a restored painting of **French King Charles X** reviewing troops in Paris and to hear about a concert scheduled for next year to celebrate the anniversary of a recital presented by **Maurice Ravel** in the very Music Room where we were sipping champagne.

French Ambassador Alexis Duterre hosted us at the Buquoy Palace embassy.

Detail of the portrait of Charles X.

Gathered around an embassy piano Ravel once played.

Driving to the city outskirts we visited charming Veltrusy Palace. It's second 18th-century owner **Count Rudolf Chotek** had hosted a visit of Marie Antoinette's mother **Empress Maria Theresa** whose portrait is on display along with a painting of her older children.

Veltrusy Castle dates from 1715.

Anne Lantry near a portrait of Marie Antoinette's mother Empress Maria Theresa who visited Veltrusy Castle.

Portrait of Marie Antoinette's older siblings. The 15th of 16 children, Marie was not yet born.

Green brocade wallpaper in one salon can be recognized from its appearance in a Veltrusy room that was shown in the film *Amadeus*.

Canon **Gajza Sidlovsky**, Director of the magnificent Strahov Monastery Library led us around the Theological and Philosophical Halls which houses a treasury of over 350,000 volumes plus antique manuscripts and globes.

Precious books and globes in the Strahov Monastery Library.

Library Director Canon Gajza Sidlovsky pointed out historic treasures.

A library desk converts into steps to reach high bookshelves.

We sampled classic Czech cuisine at local restaurants feasting on roast duck with pumpkin puree waterside at the Kampa Restaurant on the Moldava riverbank. The Art Nouveau décor of Obecní dům was the setting for goat cheese mousse and baked trout fillets. At traditional gastropub V Kolkovne we feasted on roast duck served with dumplings, white cabbage and sauerkraut, raising steins of Pilsner Urquell in a toast to the to classic cuisine.

Riverside lunch on Kampa island.

Francis Hammond, Sharon Hoge, Baron Roland de l'Espee, and Princesse Beatrice.

Princesse Beatrice and tour assistant manager Anna Caparro.

A long table was set in the Art Deco Obecni Dum Restaurant.

Lunch at classic beer hall V Kolkovne.

L. to r.: Princesse Beatrice and Francis Hammond raise glasses of famous Czech Pilsner Urquell beer; Katherine Harris and David Hamilton opt for a glass of white.

A cocktail reception at the sumptuous apartment of **Jaromir Cisar**, a prominent lawyer, preceded our grand finale dinner at the Lobkowitz Palace. A preservationist and collector, Cisar exhibits his collection of works by Czech painters on upholstered walls. The apartment's balconies overlook the sparkling waters of the Moldava River and lights of the castles and churches across the way.

Lawyer, preservationist, and collector Jaromir Cisar welcomed us to his apartment.

Keith Crow studies Mr. Cisar's collection of Czech paintings.

Elizabeth Parker Crow at the Cisar reception.

Josée Nadeau.

After an evening tour of darkened St. Vitus Cathedral, we walked to the Lobkowitz Palace for an elegant farewell meal. A string quartet serenaded with pop songs as we arrived. AFV President **Catharine Hamilton** thanked our hosts and acknowledged the wonderful efforts of Princesse Beatrice who creates memorable heritage journeys which enlighten our understanding of history and culture while supporting preservation of the treasures of Versailles.

A private night visit to St. Vitus Cathedral.

Excellent guide Radka Vocetkova pointed out St. Vitus Cathedral highlights.

A string quartet welcomed us to Lobkowitz Palace.

Elaborate dinner service at Lobkowitz Palace.

Pork tenderloin cut, mashed sweet potatoes, and glazed carrots.

Former Society des Amis de Versailles President Baron Roland de l'Espee thanks American Friends of Versailles President Catharine Hamilton for her Versailles preservation efforts.

Jim Hanson at the farewell meal.

A fond farewell at Lobkowitz Palace.

Funds raised by the AFV are contributing to restoration of the Bosquet de la Reine, a private garden once devoted to **Marie Antoinette**. Since its inception two decades ago the AFV have contributed close to \$7 million dollars for restoration of the Trois Fontanes Bosquet, the Pavillon Frais, and the fresco ceiling painting of the Queen's Guards Room.

Those interested in joining these efforts of Franco-American friendship can contact info@americanfriendsofversailles.org.

A view of the Bosquet de la Reine.

Trois Fontaines Bosquet.

The Pavillon Frais.

Photographs by *Francis Hammond, Sharon King Hoge, & Michele Fieschi-Fouan.*

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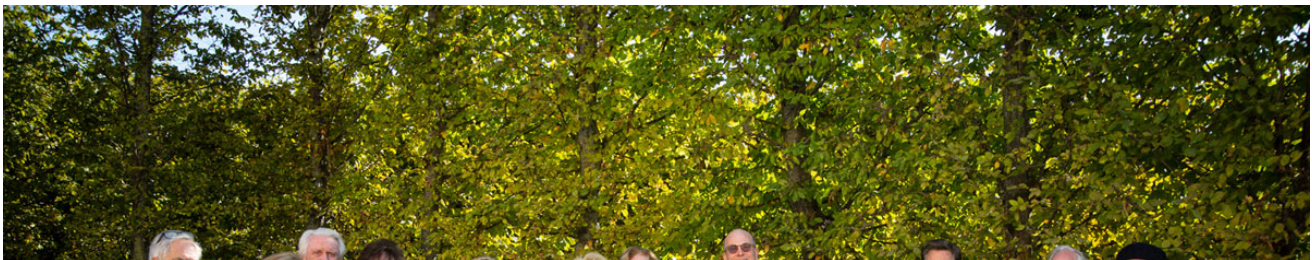
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