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The Death of Jaromír Czernin 1908

Abstract: *This article evaluates the death and funeral culture in the high aristocratic society of the Habsburg monarchy at the turn of the twentieth century, focusing on the illness and death of the mostly forgotten Count Jaromír Czernin (1818–1908). It attempts a comparison with other cases that took place within a similar period and social milieu, and tries to define what constituted an ordinary funeral ceremony. The text below illustrates that this specific funeral was entirely typical in its time within this stratum of society. The article uses mostly archive sources from the family archive in Jindřichův Hradec and articles from newspapers of the time.*

Key words: *Jaromír Czernin – funeral – burial – death – Jindřichův Hradec*

As the Viennese weekly high society magazine *Wiener Salonblatt* reported: “26 November 1908 saw the death of a doyen of the Czech aristocracy.”¹ The figure of this count has hitherto been neglected, since Jaromír Czernin was less publicly active and visible than his father Eugen Charles Czernin (1796–1868).²

This article will focus strictly on the death of Jaromír Czernin, and as a material contribution it can be used as a basis for further research into the figure of the count.³ The methodology is quite simple. It makes use of deep research into part of the Czernin family archive in Jindřichův Hradec, where Jaromír’s estate is located.⁴ Documents were selected

1 Wiener Salonblatt, 28th November 1908, p. 16.

2 An example of the very broad focus on Eugen Charles is the voluminous study: Adolf HRADECKÝ, *Evžen Karel Černín z Chudenic; jeho život dílo a odkaz*, Jindřichův Hradec 1997.

3 The general problem with the literature about the Czernin Family is its scarcity. Certain periods are covered by quality publications such as Hana BOROVSÁ, *Jazyk a korespondence Humprechta Jana Černína z Chudenic a Zuzany Černínové z Harasova*, Brno 2013; Jaroslav ČECHURA, *Černínové versus Kysibelští*, Praha 2003; Zdeněk HOJDA – Eva CHODĚJOVSKÁ (eds.), *Heřman Jakub Černín na cestě za Alpy a Pyreneje I+II.*, Praha 2014; Pavel KOBLASA, *Czernínové z Chudenic*, České Budějovice 2000; Ingeborg MECKLING, *Die Ausenpolitik des Grafen Czernin*, Wien 1969; František TEPLÝ, *Dějiny města Jindřichova Hradce*, Jindřichův Hradec 1936; Zdeněk KALISTA, *Korespondence Zuzany Černínové z Harrasova s jejím synem Humprechtem Janem Černínem z Chudenic*, Praha 1940; etc.

4 SOA Třeboň, pobočka (subdivision) Jindřichův Hradec, Rodinný archiv (RA, family archive) Černínů, kart. 456.

from this archive which contain information about the death and burial of Jaromír Czernin, for example letters, the funeral announcement, a commemorative file, bills and others. These sources were deeply examined and compared with the literature. The literature in the footnotes refers to the context which is outside the focus of this material study.

Jaromír Czernin was born on 13 March 1818 to the young couple Eugen Charles Czernin and his wife Maria Theresia, née Orsini-Rosenberg. The name Jaromír is Czech and unusual in this family, but his father Eugen was highly interested in the Czech National Movement. Eugen and Maria enjoyed a stable and calm relationship, and the number of their children gradually increased to a total of four sons and two daughters. From his childhood Jaromír was quiet, calm and balanced, as well as introverted and individual. As was common in his time and social rank, he studied at home with the help of private teachers and tutors, as did his siblings. He was constantly prepared for the role of Head of the House of Czernin. After completing his studies he attempted to find work as a state officer in the Moravian Land office. In Brno he fell in love with Caroline Schafgotsch (1820–1876), who was from a less renowned but noble family. This couple also brought six children into the world. Their four daughters married eminent men, thus bringing powerful and noble relatives into the family. Alas, both their sons Eugen (1851–1925) and Francis (1857–1932) remained childless. Family was of especial importance for Jaromír, and he did not take positions in politics and the state because this would have forced him to spend considerable time away from his family. For example, in 1865 he refused an offer from the Prime Minister Richard Belcredi (1823–1902) to appoint him to the position of Czech Land Governor. Politically he remained moderate, without expressing any strong viewpoints, criticising only nationalism. As the head of the house of Czernin he was a member of the Imperial House of Lords. After Caroline's death in 1879 he married once more, to the widowed countess Josefine Falkenheyn née Paar (1839–1916). In his old age he lived in seclusion, with the result that his legacy is not so visible as that of his father, and he fell into oblivion.

Nowadays death is separated from reality as much as possible, with the result that a modern man does not want to look at a dying person. Death is left to doctors and hospitals as the relevant institute, and as such is viewed rather as the jurisdiction of the state than of the family. In many cases, death is understood rather as a failure of medical science. Today the process of reconciling oneself to the death of a loved one is more complicated, because there is a lack of more pronounced rituals such as the period of mourning and grief.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, death took place at home, within the family circle. It took time, but the family grieved together and it was easier for them to come to terms with the event. Although death became an uncomfortable and to a certain extent unnatural matter from the middle of the 19th century onwards, in noble society the tradition of a “good death” within the family circle was maintained for much longer than among

the bourgeoisie, where death was gradually transformed into something that was refused and cast out, as it was not a part of a life.⁵

The manner of Jaromír Czernin's death is a shining example of a "good" noble death.⁶ His daughter-in-law Francisca (1857–1926), the wife of his son and heir Eugen, wrote three letters to the forestry officer in the city of Jindřichův Hradec, Henry (Jindřich) Wachtel.⁷ The first letter dates to 23 November 1908. Francisca informs that the count has been struck down with a mild case of pneumonia, but he is still able to move, he is eating sufficiently and his heartbeat is as it should be. The doctor has said that the chances of recovery are remarkably high, although at his advanced age nothing is sure. The letter ends by expressing the wish that with the help of the Lord, all will be good again. On the following day, 24 November, Francisca was not so optimistic. The powers of the noble patient were rapidly draining away. The doctor was called from the city of Teplice, and stated that if the patient's condition had not improved within two days, the family should prepare themselves for the worst. He also recommended that the patient receive the Last Rites the next day. Jaromír did not eat and his condition worsened. The last letter from 25 November is only waiting for death. "*Today my dear father in law slept only half the time, he is very weak. He received the Holy Communion at the beginning of this sickness, and yesterday he received the Last Rites*".⁸

Let us pause briefly to examine the role of the doctor and priest.⁹ Like many others, Jaromír's case confirms Philippe Aries's theory about *Nuncius Mortis*.¹⁰ Documents such as bills show that a doctor must have been called, possibly the best doctor available.¹¹ He had to say what nobody wanted to hear: "Prepare yourselves for a death in the family." Of equal status with the doctor was the priest, whose role it was to prepare the dying person's soul

5 Václav GRUBHOFFER, *Pod závojem smrti*, České Budějovice 2013, pp. 32–34.

6 More on the concept of "good death" in Philippe ARIÈS, *Dějiny smrti II.*, Praha 2000; Michel VOVELLE, *La morte e l'Occidente, Dal 1300 á nos jours*, Paris 1983. This concept is well known from late medieval title *Ars Moriendi* from the first half of the 15th Century. Jaromír died in a time of transition. Until the first half of the 19th century, the dying process took place within the family circle and under the impression of romanticism, but after half a century the death of someone else became a reminder of one's own mortality.

7 From the 18th century, the Wachtel family was strongly fixed on forests in the domain of Jemčina and Jindřichův Hradec. It is possible to assume that after so many generations the attachment between the Czernin and Wachtel families was more than professional. It was absolutely unusual to inform somebody outside the family about sickness and dying, except for employees. The reason why these letters are addressed to the officer Wachtel is a question for future research.

8 SOA Třeboň, pobočka Jindřichův Hradec, RA Černínů, kart. 456, letters of countess Francisca.

9 More on the role of the priest in Pat JALLAND, *Death in the Victorian family*, Oxford 1996, pp. 17–19.

10 P. ARIÈS, *Dějiny smrti II.*, pp. 318–323.

11 More on the role of the doctor in Petr SVOBODNÝ – Ludmila HLAVÁČKOVÁ, *Lékař a smrt*, in: Helena Lorenzová et al. (eds.), *Fenomén smrti v české kultuře 19. století*, Praha 2001, pp. 383–398.

for eternal life. As the member of the highest society in the Habsburg monarchy, Jaromír was also a member of the Catholic Church. He wished to take communion *at the beginning of his sickness*. He was balanced and well prepared to depart from this life.

The motif of a “good death” was well known in noble families. Jaromír saw his father die this way. Eugen Charles died of pneumonia on 11 July 1868. To his last days he actively participated in cultural and political life. Jaromír was by his father’s side while his sickness progressively worsened, and helped him with his diaries.¹² Eugen’s process of dying involved the same stages we have seen in the case of Jaromír, namely: deteriorating condition – family congregating together – summoning a doctor and priest. On the last day of his life, at four o’clock in the morning the family was woken up to pray in the church. They then came to his bedside, and Count Czernin died shortly before seven o’clock within the family circle. His funeral was grandiose, and his remains were placed in the family crypt in the Church of St. James in Jindřichův Hradec, next to his wife.¹³ The burial ritual itself was entirely commonplace for the House of Czernin and for the aristocracy¹⁴ in the Habsburg Monarchy in general.

Let us return to Jaromír. His exact time of death was four o’clock in the morning on 26 November. As we can see on his funeral card (Attachment 1), printed the same day:

“... (he) died at the age of ninety-one years after a short illness and last anointing at four o’clock in the morning on 26 November. The earthly remains of the beloved will be ceremonially blessed on Saturday 28 November and placed in to the family crypt in Jindřichův Hradec and laid to eternal rest at ten o’clock in the morning on 30th November. Requiem masses will be held in all patronal churches.”¹⁵

This card was used not only for the announcement, but also for family representation. Jaromír’s son Eugen promptly adopts the title *Head of the House, Hradec*, as a symbol of continuity. The document names Jaromír’s wife Countess Josefine and his daughter-in-law Francisca as the next relatives, mentioned immediately in bold script, followed by the full name of Jaromír with all his titles and functions.

12 Eugen Charles left behind thousands of pages of grand diary work.

13 A. HRADECKÝ, *Karel Evžen*, pp. 376–377.

14 On the complicated system of the nobility in the Habsburg monarchy in the 19th Century, and its lifestyle, see Hannes STEKL – Marija WAKOUNIG, *Windisch-Graetz. Ein Fürstenhaus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Wien – Köln – Weimar 1992; Jan ŽUPANIČ, *Nová šlechta rakouského císařství*, Praha 2006; Hannes STEKL, *Österreichs Aristokratie im Vormärz. Zur Geschichte der Fürstenhäuser Liechtenstein und Schwarzenberg*, Mnichov 1973; Karl SCHWARZENBERG, *Geschichte des reichständischen Hauses Schwarzenberg*, Neustadt a. d. Aisch 1963; Ralph MELVILLE – Armgard VON REDEN-DOHNA (eds.), *Adel an der Schwelle des Bürgerlichen Zeitalters 1780–1860*, Mainz 1988; Ivo CERMAN, *Chotkové: příběh úřednické šlechty*, Praha 2008; etc.

15 SOA Třeboň, pobočka Jindřichův Hradec, RA Černínů, kart. 456, Funeral card.

This printed funeral card was sent to 620 addresses, mostly institutions and persons such as municipalities, doctors, lawyers, teachers, associations, clubs, important local personages, military officers, and many others. The card for aristocratic relatives may have been different and more personal, alas this has not been preserved. This card may have been attached with a letter, usually funeral and wedding cards are well preserved and documented in the archives of noble families. Although it may seem to be quite a large number of funeral cards, for example when Princess Marie of Schwarzenberg, née Kinsky died, the family had a total of 3 100 funeral cards printed.¹⁶

The burial ceremony in Jindřichův Hradec was very well prepared.¹⁷ The attending guests were guided through the ceremony with a printed flyer, which contained information about the order of the funeral procession. The crowd was divided into twenty-two groups. The first leading group were the paupers of the city, followed by other groups such as paupers from the poorhouse and hospital of St. Vincentina, schoolchildren, menial staff, deputies of various local associations, singers, tourists and firemen. Behind them were students from high school, marksmen, the deputy of the city, local bankers, and senior domestic staff, who formed the last of the public part. There then followed musicians, wreath bearers, clerics, and the burial carriage itself, drawn by a team of six black horses. Behind the carriage went the family and the invited mourning guests.¹⁸

It is a pity that no reports about appearance of the funeral procession have been preserved, except for a few photographs (Attachment 2) and necrologies, which we will deal with later. No narrative sources on the event have been preserved, and so we must instead turn to financial documents. We can form a certain picture of the appearance and course of the burial ceremony from a bill for a similar occasion held for Jaromír's younger brother Humbert (1827–1910), who was buried two years later. He was the founder of another lineage of the House of Czernin in Graz, Austria.¹⁹

It is not so important as to how much money was spent, but rather what it was spent on. The final sum of money was 710 crowns. The issue is that Humbert was not the Head of the House, and in Jaromír's case the sum was appreciably higher. The largest amount was spent on the construction and decoration of the catafalque. The second largest was a payment to the choir. It was then necessary to remunerate the provostship for the ecclesiastical matters of the funeral. Additionally, a solo singer was hired just for the requiem. The gardeners

16 Zdeněk BEZECNÝ, *Smrt šlechtice*, in: H. Lorenzová et al. (eds.), *Fenomén smrti*, p. 264.

17 Contemporary research focuses more on burial culture in Czech Renaissance and Early Modern history. More on the burial ceremony in: Václav BŮŽEK a kol., *Věk urozených, šlechta v českých zemích na prahu novověku*, Praha – Litomyšl 2020.

18 SOA Třeboň, pobočka Jindřichův Hradec, RA Černínů, kart. 456.

19 *Ibid.*

were also on standby, and had to prepare and hold the floral decoration. Flowers were placed by the catafalque and in the rooms of the castle. The catafalque itself was built anew every time, but the black velvet fabrics were stored in the castle and were used many times. It was necessary to clean and repair them just before the ceremony. A small amount of money was also paid to a man who took care of the flags and standards. A larger amount was earmarked for the repair of a road leading to St. James Church and family crypt. This work was performed by twenty-five men and women. Because of the sum for sand, it is possible to assume that it was necessary to repair the road. The cleaning of the surroundings and cutting of the grass was surely included. However, the fact that some of the workers were paid also for night watch duties indicates that this did not merely concern the paving of the road, but also decorative adaptations, which may have included floral decoration, cutting of the grass and cleaning of the surrounding area, with night watchmen paid to ensure that the decoration was not damaged. The family also provided money for the city thoroughfare. As was customary from the Early Modern period onwards, some money was also spent on candles.²⁰ Other items such as horses, the banquet, the carriage and the guards of honour, were covered by the running costs of the estate of Jindřichův Hradec.

An important issue is the coverage of the nobleman's death in the newspapers. In the archive files we can find different clippings, and one is even copied. It is a text of a funeral speech written and presented by Alphonse Mensdorff-Pouilly. This speech was printed in the newspaper *Das Vaterland*.²¹ If we consider that the name Alphonse is quite common in the Mensdorf family, then we cannot be entirely sure which Alphonse it was, although most probably it was Alphonse Vladimír Mensdorf-Pouilly (1864–1935), who was politically active at that time and was also related to Jaromír. Their wives were both from the Paar family, related as aunt and niece.

After a short introduction, in which he mourned good times past, he came to the interesting and symbolic part, which took us to the family crypt above the city of Jindřichův Hradec. *“From here we can see the never ending forests that Jaromír loved so much. And so, like the roots of that forest, Jaromír was connected with his Czech land”*.²² The forest plays a substantial role in the thoughts of the nobility. It acts as a symbol of the long-term purpose of the family, and not only the individual. The speech is also emotional and deeply moving. The description of the personality of the beloved gives an impression of a true ruler.

“The title of ruler was not empty for him, (...) he fulfilled it with dignity, although he was always polite. He must have made a strong impression on the people who had the pleasure of knowing him.

20 SOA Třeboň, pobočka Jindřichův Hradec, RA Černínů, kart. 456.

21 *Das Vaterland*, 4 December 1908, p. 7.

22 *Ibid.* (paraphrase)

*He was balanced in every aspect of his character. He represented precisely the best qualities of a noble man. An aristocrat from head to toe.*²³

Jaromír's political activities as a member of parliament were also evaluated by Alphonse M.-P. It is possible to characterise Jaromír as a typical aristocrat of his time. Rather than identifying with any of the individual nations, he accentuated the dynasty and monarchy. On occasion he attempted to calm national tensions. Alphonse referred to him as a true black-gold Austrian. He was at home in Jindřichův Hradec, where the Czechs were in the majority, as well as in Petrohrad and Krásný Dvůr, where the Germans were in the majority. As Alphonse added: "*We are in ever increasing need of men like him!*"²⁴

Naturally, other newspapers and local journals also noticed that something greater had passed with the death of the count. A biographical portrait of him was published as a two-page supplement in a special edition of the local paper *Ohlas od Nežárky*, which had been supported by the House of Czernin for many years. One interesting aspect of the funeral procession is clarified in this paper, namely the position of the poor at the head of the funeral procession: "*A recent noble contribution of His Highness was our city's collection of over 9000 crowns for beds in the St. Vincentina hospital.*"²⁵ This charitable foundation for the poor and sick was only one part of Jaromír's philanthropy. Every year, to mark the anniversary of the House of Czernin's dominion of the Jindřichův Hradec estate, several financial donations were divided among the local poor and needy.²⁶ Jaromír was highly interested in this philanthropy, and for this reason the local poor were at the front of his funeral procession, symbolising his extraordinary solicitude.

Czernin's death was also covered in most national newspapers, although mostly only with a few lines. The Czech papers were not especially flattering towards him, but neither were they particularly disparaging. Jaromír was referred to as a *true black-gold Austrian*,²⁷ which can we translate as a man loyal to the emperor and a true member of aristocratic society. The aristocracy liked to regard itself as a group above nations within a monarchy composed of several nations, and wished to be a unifying force. They adhered to the notion of a nation in the sense of belonging to the land, and wanted to maintain the interests of the land where they lived. It was not important to them as to whether they spoke German or Czech.

For context and comparison can we mention other funerals which were similar in terms of the time in which they took place, and their social rank. The first of these is the well

23 *Ibid.* (paraphrase)

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ohlas od Nežárky*, 27 November 1908, special attachment.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Das Vaterland*, 4 December 1908, p. 7.

documented burial of Prince and head of the House of Schwarzenberg, Adolph Joseph (1832–1914). The funeral was held in the city of Třeboň. Many important personages such as the bishop and deputies from political and public life were in attendance. The black catafalque containing the remains of the prince was placed in the middle of the monastery church. The mass in the town was followed by the funeral procession, ranked according to social status. The coffin was taken to the funeral carriage, and brought to the family crypt by the lake beyond the city.²⁸ In short, it was a larger and more ostentatious ritual, but otherwise very similar to that held six years earlier for Jaromír Czernin.

The death of Jaromír Czernin was reported, but not as widely as the death of Charles V von Schwarzenberg (1886–1914). This man was highly valued and marked as a possible national leader, even by the enemy of the Czech aristocracy Joseph Holeček.²⁹ Charles Schwarzenberg died young, in the first days of the First World War in Vukovar in the Balkans. His funeral was not so grandiose.³⁰ Much more honour was paid to Wenzel Robert Kounic (1848–1913), who died unexpectedly of a cold. After his last farewell in Uherský Brod, a special burial train was dispatched for him. A crowd numbering thousands came to the train station and lined the railway tracks.³¹ Wenzel R. Kounic was active in the aristocratic political party of the conservative aristocrats, and subsequently in the *Young Czech Party*.³² He tried to improve the position of the Czech language and nation within the monarchy for many years. He was in touch with several distinguished Czech figures, for example the *Daughter of the Nation* Zdenka Havlíčková. In short, he was adored because of his pro-Czech stance. In the case of Jaromír, such interest was inconceivable. He lived for many years remote from the centre of interest, and left almost nobody to remember his political career. In addition, his opinion was more universal than national, which was not a popular stance at that time.

Conclusion

Jaromír Czernin died at the age of ninety-one years old. Despite his advanced years, his death came as a surprise, after he suddenly contracted influenza. His funeral was held in grandiose style, with the procession passing through the city of Jindřichův Hradec, from the castle to the family crypt in the Church of St. James above the city. The funeral

28 Václav GRUBHOFFER, *Pod závojem smrti*, České Budějovice 2013, pp. 151–153.

29 Josef HOLEČEK, *Česká šlechta*, Praha 1918, p. 42.

30 Karl SCHWARZENBERG, *Geschichte des reichständischen Hauses Schwarzenberg band II.*, Neustadt a. d. Aisch 1963, pp. 330–331.

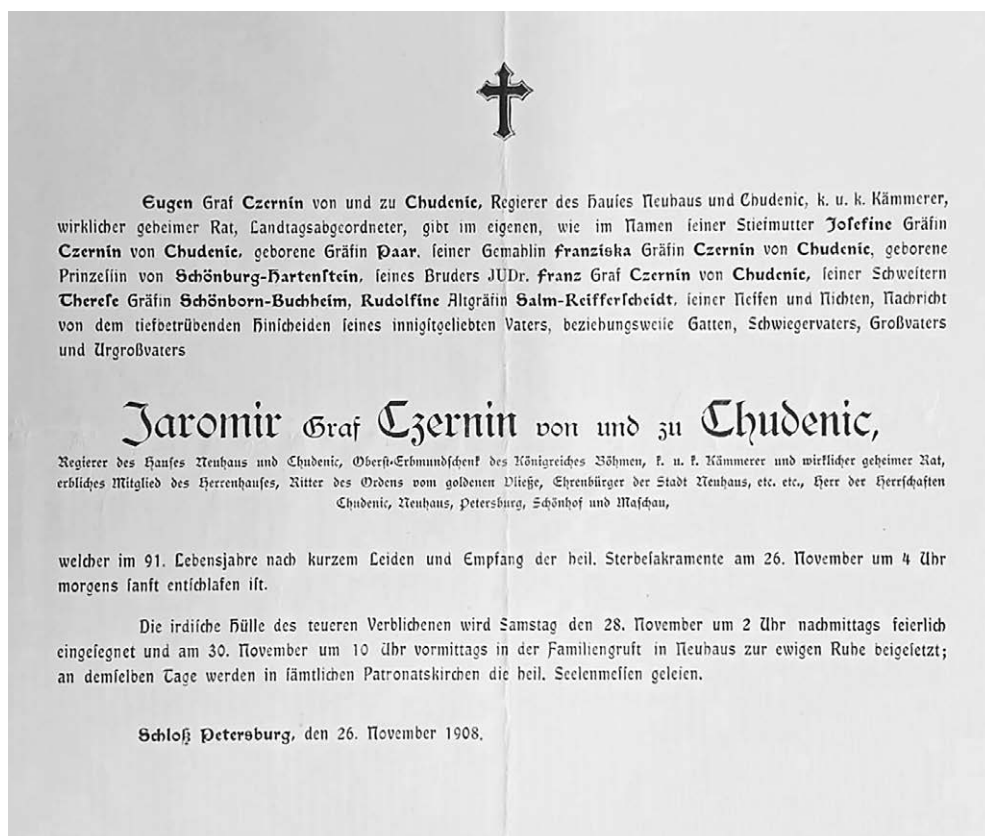
31 Oldřich KLOBAS, *Václav Hrabě Kounic. Šlechtic nejen rodem*, Brno 1993, pp. 97–101; *Rudé květy* 13, 2013, vol. 11, p. 1.

32 For more about the party see Jiří GEORGIEV, *Až do těch hrdel a statků*, Praha 2011.

ceremony and dying process share many of the same attributes as that of his father Eugen Charles. Further examples which can serve as a comparison include the funerals of his brother Humbert, as well as those of noblemen like Adolph Joseph Schwarzenberg or Wenzel Kounic. Schwarzenberg was buried as a powerful and wealthy prince, while Kounic was buried as a popular national figure. In this comparison we can see that the funeral of Jaromír Czernín is nothing unusual, as it represents the period during which he lived and his social rank. The only extraordinary features are the letters between Countess Czernin and the forestry officer Wachtel. This may stimulate further research into the relationship between the Czernin family and their clerk.

Attachment 1

SOA Třeboň, pobočka Jindřichův Hradec, RA Černínů, kart. 456.



Attachment 2

SOA Třeboň, pobočka Jindřichův Hradec, RA Černínů, kart. 456.

Z POHŘBU JEHO EXCELL. HRABĚTE JAROMÍRA ČERNÍNA V JINDŘICHOVĚ HRADCI



Fot. pro „Č. S.“ amat. J. Šedivý



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SLAVNOST POSVĚCENÍ NÁHROBKU

zeměděleho dlouholetého starosty Prvního pražského spolku steno-grafů Gabelsberger-ských, Josefa Krondla konána byla v Polní dne 1. listopadu 1908 za velkého účastenství. Za spolek dostavila se deputace sestávající ze starosty dra. Sejky a pokladníka Josefa Libory, dále zastoupen byl okresní výbor klatovský starostou dr. Hostašem, obec klatovská starostou svým a dlouholetým přítelem Krondlovým dr. Maskem, obec polenská, z rodiny oslaven-covy vdova jeho a dcera, ducho-venstvo z celého kraje a ohrom-ný počet obecnictva. Odhalení pomníku konáno o 12. hodině polední. Starosta spolku Dr. Sejk vyřčil v hlavních rysech záslu-hy Krondlovy o českou stenogra-fii, a vzpomněl holetně ztráty jeho, kterou zejména nyní, kdy se jedná o vybudování a přijetí soustavy nové, živě cítilme.



NÁHROBEK JOS. KRONDLA S ÚČASTNÍKY SLAVNOSTI POSVĚCENÍ JEHO V POLNÍ
Z leva na pravo: Dr. Hostáš, starosta okr. výboru, p. Krondlová s decess., farář Frant. Krondl, prof. K. Kruppert z Klatov, J. Libora, čl. výb. praž. sp. sten., dr. Mašek, starosta m. Klatov, dr. J. Sejka, starosta spolku sten., Lang, zást. obch. a živnost. komory