August Geringer - Publisher, benefactor and humanitarian

Problems of historical and rare book collections of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia

August Geringer - Publisher, benefactor and humanitarian

Milena Secká

A. Geringer is now almost an unknown person, but at the turn of the 19th and 20th century he was a man who influenced the lives of thousands of Czechs. He turned from a poor bookbinder to a millionaire and educated and entertained the rich and the poor with his newspapers and books.

His life story is worth remembering, even though it was not unique in his time. Many Czechs have worked hard to spread the fame of Czech art in the world, and although several Czechs have established themselves in the field of publishing and publishing in America, August Geringer was a true star among them. [1]

August Geringer [2] was born on 2 August 1842 in Březnice as the second of eleven children of the old teaching family of Václav and Amálie Geringer. The teacher's salary was so small that his father tried to earn a living by teaching music and bookbinding. He not only led his son to education, but also taught him to bind books to help him. However, when he was supposed to go to Prague for secondary school, he preferred to work in bookbinding and studied at an evening school.

After a year and a half he went to his relatives in Vienna, where he wanted to improve his craft and language. He worked in leather haberdashery and later specialized in producing photo albums that came into fashion at the time. In the evenings and Sundays he helped his aunt's brother-in-law, who had a furniture factory. He helped not only with production, but also with negotiating orders. He thus gained very valuable experience, which was very useful in the future.

In 1862, under pressure from his family, he returned home to stop his ill father. He passed the exam at the vicar and took up the position of assistant teacher in Lašovice for six years. In addition to teaching children, this meant ministering and assisting in church ceremonies, ringing bells, playing the organ, singing and practicing singers for all the feasts of the figural mass. He had to keep a register and annually check the population records, collect tuition and organize the cultural and social life of the village. He had found time for bookbinding and had so many orders that he had to marry an assistant. He bound not only prayers to neighbors, but also books for parishes and official books for the nobility of Orlick. He was also given permission to sell and bind school books.

In the summer of 1868, he met a girl at the coaching inn in Milín, where he stopped for lunch, turning very cleverly in the kitchen. After a while he wrote to her and revealed his feelings. After a favorable response, he visited the girl, immediately became engaged and on February 4, 1869 Antonie Kolarova became Mrs. Geringerova in the Lašovice church. The fathers of single daughters from around the world were very
displeased that their single teacher had brought a cross-country girl and made it clear to Augustus. One of the reasons why he began to think of emigration was just the hostility of his fellow citizens and their rude. In Chicago, Geringer had a well-known musician, and he advised him to bring as many books and bookbinding supplies as possible, as books were very rare among American compatriots in America. June 20, 1869 Geringer went on a journey with his wife, sister-in-law and two brother-in-law. The firm Kareš and Stotzky dispatched them from Bremen to New York, where the company representative was supposed to transport them to Chicago. He provided them with train tickets and, with hundreds of other immigrants, set off on their journey. Because the trains did not run at night and Sunday, they stopped where they were and passengers had to take care of themselves before they left. Along the way, the train was also ambushed, and starving passengers hid in the woods before shooting. After five days of adventurous journeys, they arrived in Chicago to find an apartment with the help of their compatriots. There were about 17,000 Czechs at that time in Chicago. Immediately it was spread that a young countryman had arrived and brought a lot of books, so Geringer soon sold his entire stock very advantageously, could pay off his debts, and set aside a financial reserve. Immediately he started bookbinding, changed employers and flat several times, until he contacted the typesetter and set up his own bookstore and small printer. He ordered various types of Czech script from the Czech foundry from Grégr, printed occasional prints and the beginnings were good. His wife, as a good cook, started cooking for several boarders, helping to improve the family budget.

7.10.1871 Chicago was hit by a major fire, which destroyed more than 17,500 houses and almost all printers. Miraculously, Geringer's printing house (as one of three in the city) was saved without harm and, of course, was immediately overwhelmed with a large number of orders. Day and night work and considerable income allowed Geringer to move again for the better and, after joining Josef Langmayer, opened a larger printing house. He started publishing a four-page magazine Chicago Journal, which was distributed free of charge and financed by advertising and advertising. Since 1874, Geringer also began to publish fictional novels, which immediately had over a thousand subscribers.

In Chicago, there was a Czech liberal school since 1870, where it was taught from readers imported from Bohemia. As a former teacher, Geringer decided to publish new textbooks for the whole of Czech America that would ideally suit the new environment and would not celebrate the Austrian monarchy. With the help of compatriot Zdrůbek, editor of West Progress [3] and a teacher in Omaha, they created the first picture reader. Despite all the difficulties, the work was successful and Czech children in America then learned from it for many decades.

In 1875, František Boleslav Zdrůbek moved to Chicago and began planning to publish the first Czech daily with Geringer. He was named Svornost and the first number was published 8.10.1875. At the same time, the weekly Amerikan was established, which took over the news from the diary and was intended primarily for rural areas and remote places where the mail was not able to deliver the diary. For a long time the editor was Zdrůbek himself, Geringer led a bookstore, bookbinding and printer. Since 1876 he also established a paper wallpaper shop and himself and his workers decorated many flats, shops and inns. He used his haberdashery experience, since it was fashionable to decorate walls except for paper with gilded cornices and velvet ornaments. The profit from wallpapering has often helped finance the printing and publishing of books.

Svornost also began publishing compelling novels, because there was still a great hunger for reading among the displaced people and most of the troubled lack of books. The daily was much helped by paid advertisements and advertisements, which grew steadily and therefore contributed to enlarging the periodical. In 1876 Geringer began publishing the humoristic picture magazine Rarášek and a year later he added to Svornost a Sunday letter entitled Spirit of Time. [4]

In 1877, a Sunday Czech free school was opened in Chicago, and when a suitable teacher was not found, Geringer volunteered to teach every Sunday afternoon. His diligence was a great example of collaborators and family. He raised his four children - two sons and two daughters - and led them both to diligence and patriotism.
In 1879, Svornost increased again, as did the American and Geringer began to consider a new mansion. He built a new three-story building and equipped the printer with state-of-the-art machines. In addition to his periodicals, he began printing Oklahoma newspapers, Baltimore and Alleghen Letters. Since 1878 he also published his own calendar, also called the American, [5], which became not only the oldest Czech calendar, but also in terms of expansion and duration is still a unique and unsurpassed source. He faithfully recorded the history of the Czech minority in America, but he was also a tool for farming, textbooks and entertainment.

Over 55 years of publishing, Geringer has published more than 200 book titles with educational, historical, scientific and entertainment content. The first title was already mentioned Czech-American reader. Soon there was a need for a good textbook of English, prepared again Fr.B.Zdrůbek under the name Czech-American silencer. It is true that many Czechs from the oldest generation of immigrants did not know English and often did not need English much, as individual ethnic minorities formed their neighborhoods. Geringer himself did not speak English very well and yet he succeeded in doing business. For the poorer he published a cheap English textbook and also a dictionary. Knowledge of the new environment, its laws, regulations and history was also needed for immigrants. Geringer published both Čermák's History of America and Palacký's History of the Czech Nation. The most popular prints were various guides and handbooks, such as the Home Cookbook, Quick Count, Parliamentary Rules, Funeral Speeches, Speeches and Speeches for Federal Festivals, Complete Collection of Speeches and Speeches for All Federal and National Occasions, Czech American Songbook etc. were free-thinking books (Catechisms of Free-Youth, Christianity and Education, Lie Religious in Mankind Educated, Master Jan Hus at the Constance Council, Power and Matter, Pain's Age of Reason, Klaus's Cosmos, Strauss's Life of Jesus or Kenig's Biography of Charles Darwin). The fiction works also received great acclaim. The best titles included novels by A. Dumas or J.Vern, but several editions have also received čkaloud's humoresques Bordynkáři or U Kratinů or the writings of Bedřich Moravec, Josef Buňata, Pavel Albieri, R. Jaromír Pšenka and others.

In 1917, Geringer's enterprise moved again and again into a new building built by Czech architect Robert Layer. The plant was equipped with new machines driven by more than 20 electric motors and more than a hundred employees ensured perfect operation. All of this was managed by Geringer from the office and apartment he had built on the plant site. Ril had always been very modest and had no other fun than work. Only once in his life did he take a vacation; It was when in 1895 he went for several months to the old homeland of the Ethnographic Exhibition of the Slavonic. On this occasion he visited his native Březnice, Lašovice and other places in Bohemia and Moravia. All his life he kept the rule of being the first in the morning and leaving last.

He was not only concerned with his business and his employees, but he was also interested in the lives of other Czechs in America and also in the Czech Republic. From the editorial office of Svornosti, for example, the idea of establishing the Czechoslovak National Cemetery, the Cozy House, the Orphanage and the Geringer newspaper was also the main support of the Czech Sokol movement in America. After the outbreak of the First World War, Geringer immediately stood alongside Czech political emigration, headed by TG Masaryk, and Svornost remained the main, consistent and unwavering source of moral and material support for Czech state-building efforts.

Geringer also supported in secret and unpretentiously. In his charity he remembered the old country not only during his life but also in his last will. During his lifetime, he sent over 100,000 CZK to his native Březnice, several thousand to Lašovice and regularly contributed many charitable donations. He also supported individuals and random supplicants. Still on his deathbed, he urged his children to announce to the public that he did not want any flowers at the funeral, and that the money saved was to be mourned for charitable purposes.

April 2, 1930 August Geringer died after a severe operation. He wanted the funeral as simple as possible, but the whole of Chicago and its surroundings had come to say goodbye. In addition to family and friends, there were politicians, judges, congressmen, envoys, directors of various institutions and institutes, representatives of all expatriate associations and associations.
The profitable business passed to his son Miloslav and his son Vladimir, who also helped in the editorial office from his youth, became the first United States Trade Commissioner in the Czechoslovak Republic. August's daughter married RJPšenka, an editor and writer, and Vlasta's daughter, a well-known traveler, E. Stanko Vraz. In his last will, Geringer remembered not only the family and all his employees, but also the expatriate organizations and institutions in the Czech Republic. [6]

Among those that Geringer selflessly supported long-term included the Náprstek Museum, with which he maintained contacts until his death. He supplied his library with both his periodicals and books. [7]

Augustin Geringer was an extraordinary man, a representative of the Gründer generation, who was able to acquire extraordinary property and social status by her own work. Personally very sparing, thinking about the needs of others and, according to witnesses, opening his wallet several times a day for alms. His greatest merit, however, remains the priority position as a publisher. He introduced the first Czech daily in America and the periodicals he published survived it, which cannot be said about other newspapers because many titles had only ephemeral life. Also, the books he published were often published in several editions; the fourteenth edition is no exception. Educate, learn, and entertain — all the first settlers needed, and Geringer's books did. Many of them, especially the free-minded, were secretly imported into Bohemia and thus influenced readers literally in both hemispheres.

Appendix: List of books published by A.Geringer and donated to the library of the Náprstek Museum

13. Bundensen Herman N., Our Children. Mothers whose children today will be men and women of tomorrow ... 1925, 62 p.
16. Busch Wilhelm, Religious Saying about Father Filusius as a Model of the Hearts of the Jesuits, ... Br, 200 p.
18. Coomes Oll, Phil.Foghorn lord of the border or ... 1874, 144 p.
19. Čech Svatopluk, Lešetín blacksmith. br, 72 p.
23. Čermák Josef, History of the Civil War with the Connection of the Experience of Czech Private ... 1889, 414 p.
27. Czech-American Songbook. 2.vyd. 1887, 133.
40. Habenicht Jan, From the Memory of the Czech Doctor. 1900, 89 p.
41. Hájek Josef, A complete collection of speeches and speeches for all federal and national celebrations. 2 vol., 1895, 304., 320 p.
44. Hora Frantisek A., Dvorny spolecnik. Rules of Decent Behavior, Guidance and Patterns to Declare Love . . . 1890, 238 p.
46. Iška František, Biblical view of the creation of the world. Br 16 s,
55. Iška František, For the Nation - In the Service of Humanity. 1917, 603 p.
63. Kalda Josef, Funeral languages for different states and ages . . . 1886, 123 p.
64. Kalda Josef, Funeral speeches for different states and ages . . . 2nd edition Br, 140 p.
65. A book of instructions on the high arm of the American machine, which is given for premia to time. American. Br nestr.
68. Willow ring, Echoes of recent times. Romance and features from the time of the Spanish-American War. 1899, 96 p.
78. Maršovský St.E., From the records of the court ... 1907, 232 p.
91. Paine Thomas, The Age of Reason from ... 1884, 208 p.
93. The Fifth Speech of the Feast of Jan Hus ... 1903, 37 p.
96. Pogius, Master Jan Hus at the Council of Constance, ... 1908, 79 p.
97. Funeral speech above the coffin and grave for all ladies' associations. Br, 32 p.
100. Pražák Antonín - The Way to the Heart. Time novel ... 1907, 454 p.
108. Wheat Rudolf Jaromír, The sea did not bifurcate. A dramatic picture of the participation of Czech America in the struggle from the liberation of Czech and Slovak ... 1919, 80 p.
111. Pšenka Rudolf Jaromír, Bride from the grave. 1903, 497 pp.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>113</td>
<td>Wheat Rudolf Jaromir, Versus Cermak</td>
<td>1933</td>
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<td>114</td>
<td>Wheat Rudolf Jaromir, Washington Latch</td>
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<td>Pšenka Rudolf Jaromír, Golden Book of Czechoslovak Chicago</td>
<td>1926</td>
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<td>116</td>
<td>Wheat RJ ckaloud Fr.J., Bordynkari. 2nd edition, 1930</td>
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<td>117</td>
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<td>Remsburg John E. - Rudiš-Jičínský Jan, Historic Americans Travels</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>220 p</td>
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<td>119</td>
<td>Seidlová Božena, From the Diary ... You're shouting through the Soviet</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>141 p</td>
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<td>121</td>
<td>Sinclair Upton Beall, Vampire Slaughter Victims.</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>294 p</td>
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<td>123</td>
<td>Spěvák Jan, Directory of Czechs of America, issued by the Chicago</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>99 pp</td>
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<td>124</td>
<td>Staňková-Bujářková F., In the Footsteps of Czech Blood. An amendment</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>151 p</td>
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<td>125</td>
<td>Strauss David Friedrich - Zdrůbek František Boleslav, The Life of</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>262 p</td>
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<td>126</td>
<td>Holy Bible for laughter. Br, 382 pp.</td>
<td>1895</td>
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<td>127</td>
<td>World Colombian Exhibition. 1893, nestr.</td>
<td>1895</td>
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<td>128</td>
<td>JA, Growing flowers in the home. 1895</td>
<td>1895</td>
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<td>129</td>
<td>ckaloud František J., Bordynkari. A piece of Czech life in Chicago</td>
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<td>131</td>
<td>ckaloud František J., U Kratinu. A novel from the life of Chicago</td>
<td>1905</td>
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<td>132</td>
<td>cmejkal Jaromir Vaclav, Pirate Melodies. Translated from the Czech</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>77 pp</td>
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<td>133</td>
<td>cpera Alois M., How did God rise? Br, 14 pp.</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>249 p</td>
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<td>134</td>
<td>cpera Alois M., About the Soul and What Does the Church Teach About</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>63 p</td>
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<td>cpera Alois M., Father Slíva. Br, 63 p.</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>391 p</td>
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<td>137</td>
<td>cpera Josef, Little Catechism for Czech-American Schools. Br, 79 p.</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>298 pp</td>
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<td>139</td>
<td>Full Quick Calculator. A handbook for buyers and sellers with price</td>
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<td>tables in any quantity and any value from 1 cent to $10, and weigh</td>
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<td>Verne Jules, North vs. South. 1890, 200 pp.</td>
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<td>Crow Jan, Late. Image of life. Br, 55 p.</td>
<td>1890</td>
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<td>142</td>
<td>Walter A. Wood, Walter A. Wood Company on the production of mowing</td>
<td>1878</td>
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<td>and cutting machines. 1878, 12p.</td>
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<td>143</td>
<td>Weber Karl Julius - Bittner Bartos, From the Books of a Cheerful</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>232 p</td>
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<td>Philosopher ... 1892, 232 p.</td>
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<td>144</td>
<td>Wood H., Lady Isabel. Novel ... 1901, 451 p.</td>
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<td>145</td>
<td>For the independence of Texas. Historická povídka. 1902, 160 p.</td>
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<td>146</td>
<td>Zdrůbek František Boleslav, English pronouncer. Encouraging correct</td>
<td>1897</td>
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<td>Zdrůbek František Boleslav, Czech-English silencer for Czechs with</td>
<td>1907</td>
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<td>Zdrůbek František Boleslav, History of the Czech-National Cemetery in</td>
<td>1902</td>
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<td>Chicago, Illinois. 1902, 144 p.</td>
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<td>4 oprav. and reproduction., 1895, 330 p.</td>
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<td>152</td>
<td>Zdrůbek František Boleslav, Preaching about the Holy Faith, or</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td>391 p</td>
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<td>interpretations of the apostolic confession of faith ... 1879, 391 p.</td>
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<td>153</td>
<td>Zdrůbek František Boleslav, Christianity and education. 1906, 112 p.</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>112 p</td>
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154. Zdrůbek František Boleslav, New English Grammar or Leader to Acquire Proficiency in English Speaking, Reading and Writing in the Shortest Time. 1874, 269 pp.
156. Zdrůbek František Boleslav, Funeral Speech with the addition of speech in naming children, the godfather’s speech and thanks of the father ... 1881, 55 p.
157. Zdrůbek František Boleslav, Funeral Speech with the Addition of Speech in the Naming of Children ... 2.
159. Zdrůbek František Boleslav, Brief curriculum vitae of Master John of Husinec ... 1890, 32 s.
160. Zdrůbek František Boleslav - Čoka Vilém, Two religious guesses between ... editor of Svornosti and Amerikána and ... pastor at St. Prokop, in Chicago ... 1877, 38 p.
161. Zdrůbek František Boleslav - Čoka Vilém, Two Religious Guessing ... 3. rozmnož GOST, 1877, 63 s.

Footnotes

[1] Other important Czech publishers in America were Jan Rosicky of Omaha and Antonin Novak of Milwaukee.


[5] The ones he remembered in his last will in the Czech Republic were: Deyl Institute for the Blind Children in Prague, Jedlička Institute for the Crippled Children in Prague, Bacul Institute for the Crippled Children in Prague, Children's Camp in Cernovice near Tabor Hus House in Prague and others.