

The History of the Construction and Modernisation of the Princes Czartoryski Library at 17 Św. Marka St. in Krakow (1956–2010)

Summary

A decision, made in 1957/1958, to build the Princes Czartoryski Library, whose archival and book collections are part of the Princes Czartoryski Museum, set up in 1801, was unprecedented in the post-war history of Krakow and the National Museum. The Princes Czartoryski archives and library, which came under the control of the state as a separate institution on 15 December 1949, became part of the National Museum a year later. Doomed to oblivion in the first years of the communist era, up to October 1956, due to the enlightened political decisions of the then authorities of Krakow, the collections were given a highly modern edifice. The originator of the idea and advocate for the construction of the new building for the Library in 1956–1961 was Bolesław Drobner, a councillor of the city of Krakow and Member of Parliament, a socialist from a family of assimilated Polish Jews, brought up in the spirit of respect for Polish tradition. His efforts made in the city council and actions taken as a Senior MP convinced the Ministry of Culture and Art officials of the need to build an edifice at 17 Św. Marka St. to house the national collection and to find a subsidy of 2,000,000 PLN in the central budget for the implementation of the project.

Decisions on the construction of the Princes Czartoryski Library were made in the last quarter of 1957 and in January of the next year. All arrangements, consultations and preparation of detailed plans took the designers and the Heritage Conservation Studio, the investor, the whole first quarter of 1958. The building estimate, signed by the designer M. Jaroszewski, Engineer of Architecture, was ready by 11 July 1958. The legal process of taking over and purchasing the plot from a private owner took the first half of the year, and it was finally completed on 20 August 1958. Pushed by Drobner, the Municipality of Krakow speeded up the procedures for purchasing the plot from a private owner 'on account of the closeness of the Princes Czartoryski Branch,' located in Pijarska St. The construction of the Library, which started after 20 August 1958, lasted until June 1960.

Erected in haste, the building was not free of mistakes and problems typical of the real socialism. This slightly delayed the moving of the collection from Pijarska St. (June – December 1961). An important logistic role in the process of furnishing the Library and making the building and the resources available to scholars and researchers was played by the Library custodians: Docent Dr. Józef Mitkowski and Marek Wierzbicki, MA. On 6 November, the director of the National Museum took a decision about the partial opening of the Library to the readers. The full opening was organised after the official technical acceptance of the building on 3 and 5 January 1962.

The construction of the Princes Czartoryski Library at 17 Św. Marka St., the cost of which amounted to 6,287,220 PLN, was the first, after 1945, attempt to combine modern architecture with historic buildings situated in Krakow's Old Town. The architecture of the Princes Czartoryski Library (the structure and the façade) reminds forcefully of the Jagiellonian Library from Mickiewicza St. The author of the design, Engineer Marian Jaroszewski, used the model of the university library and built a *quasi* small Jagiellonian Library at 17 Św. Marka St. The Library, erected in the historic part of Krakow between 1958 and 1960 and renovated through the efforts of the director of the National Museum and the management of the Library in 1996 and 2010, serves as an example of positive action taken for the sake of preserving national cultural heritage for future generations.