



THE VILLA OF
HANA AND EDVARD
BENEŠ



Office of the Government
of the Czech Republic



*Hana and Edvard Beneš
at the entrance to the villa,
29 April 1948*

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Mr. and Mrs. Beneš

The first meeting between Hana (1885-1974) and Edvard (1884-1948) took place in Paris in 1905. A year later, Anna Vlčková and Edvard Beneš were engaged and Anna changed her name to Hana. They were married on 6 November 1909 in St. Ludmila's Cathedral in Prague's Královské Vinohrady district.



Edvard Beneš with their favourite dog, 1936



Hana Benešová on the villa's terrace, 1968

Hana brought a fairly substantial dowry to the marriage, and Edvard could peacefully devote himself to his scientific and educational career. At the same time, it must be said that she was helpful all around, with forthright interest, and for her, he was her lifelong advisor and teacher in many ways. World War I struck very sharply into their calm lives – Edvard emigrated, so that, at the side of T.G. Masaryk and M.R. Štefánika, he would later achieve extraordinary diplomatic and constructive successes, while Hana remained home and could not avoid imprisonment. This undermined her health, and probably contributed to the pair remaining childless, despite subsequent extraordinary efforts and medical care.

The Benešes' lives were transformed again with the creation of Czechoslovakia. Edvard became the foreign minister, and almost overnight Hana had to come to terms with the role of being one of the most-watched women in the country, and later with the role of the first lady. Hana was born with a natural intelligence, a respectable education, good upbringing and an accommodating approach to people, and as it turned out, it was she who gave a human face to her overworked and somewhat aloof husband, gaining the public's sympathy for him. She substituted care for her husband for unfilled motherhood, and together they found great joy in building their homes and garden. First there was their Na Zátorce villa in Prague's Bubeneč district, and later in their summer home in Sezimovo

Ústí. That became their real home, sanctuary and the center of their society life.

Despite much suffering, the marriage of Hana and Edvard Beneš, which lasted nearly 40 years, could certainly be labelled as happy, harmonious and mutually enriching. After 1948, as the widow of the second Czechoslovak president, Hana spent an additional 26 years in Sezimovo Ústí surrounded by her closest friends.





The villa's southeastern façade, 1960

Mr. and Mrs. Beneš' summer home

Hana and Edvard Beneš' summer home was built from 1930 to 1931 according to a design by architect Petr Kropáček. The construction work was carried out by the Tábor-based construction company of Antonín Soumar. Mr. and Mrs. Beneš were directly involved in the preparation of the design and construction. In his concept, the house was supposed to recall a country building in southern



The villa's main common room, 1935

France, and he wished not only for smooth walls and low roofs, but also for light rooms. In 1937, the Benešes decided to finish building the villa.

According to a design by architect Otokar Fierlinger, a new wing with a *salla terrena* was added to the northwest façade, and a small arched loggia shaded a terrace in front of the southwest façade. Living and utility areas were placed in two segmented wings in the two-story home. Social and living rooms were placed on the southwest side in the wing situated toward the Lužnice. The spacious light rooms had smooth walls, and only the living hall and studies had alcoves with shelves. The ceiling of the living hall was decorated by wooden beams and the ceiling of Beneš' study had all-wood paneling. A wooden column on each floor decorated a discreet, practical stairway leading from the vestibule. Painted with a sand yellow plaster and green painted shutters, the villa contrasted naturally with the grassy space and the leafy and coniferous woods.

In her November 1973 will, Hana Benešová bequeathed part of the furniture and the villa with its adjacent properties to the Museum of the Hussite Revolutionary Movement in Tábor. After her death, the District People's Committee in Tábor took over these properties in 1975. At the end of 1975, the villa's furniture was put in storage and the building was contractually transferred to the property of the Office of the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.



The villa's southeastern façade after refurbishment, 1990

The Government's Residence

The Office of the Presidency of the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, which took ownership of the building in 1975, requested a refurbishment from the Design Office of the City of Prague. The Prague architects, under the leadership of Jan Šrámek, worked on a proposal from 1977 to 1978 to adapt the family villa into a government residence.

The villa received a light brown paint job and the window frames were given a coat of brown, and the pantiled roof was replaced with a covering made of

copper sheeting. However, both the roof and the newly-built sheltered place above the entrance were not up to the execution and construction materials of the villa's original architectural concept. The villa's social spaces underwent a radical conversion. Of the original fittings, the tiled furnace in the president's office, some of the built-in cases and the stairway space from the vestibule to the first floor were kept. The villa gained new electrical and water distribution and a new boiler room. A heated pool with a changing room was built in the garden across from the tennis court.

In November 2000, the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic declared Edvard Beneš' former summer cottage a cultural monument.

On the initiative of Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek, the villa went through a difficult renewal from 2006 to 2009. The building's cladding was repaired during the renovation, and at the same time the color concept for the facade and window frames was based on period photo documentation. The project team, led by architect Orlin Ilinčev, prepared a proposal to restore the social areas on the ground floor to their original 1930s appearance.

Today, the villa serves not only as a representative space for prime ministers, but is also mainly a dignified memorial to Hana and Edvard Beneš, who were regular and accessible visitors to Sezimovo Ústí.



Fireplace in the small salon, 2008

*View into the small government salon,
2008*



The Park

Architect Otakar Fierlinger designed the garden, which was based on the principles of English country parks. There is a simple garden modification around the main entrance to the villa.

Opposite: *View of the garden, 1945*

Pond in the garden's parterre, 1932



A well there creates a decorative and functional complement to the grassy spaces. A rectangular garden parterre begins the private section. A small pond, folded into the space between the villa and the tennis court, is part of the parterre. A free grassy space unfolds in front of the southwest façade, and a garden pool is located on the villa's terrace. The pool had a spillway flowing down the slope in front of the park path, and on Karel Čapek's advice, the muddy location was bordered by a low wall and plinths, which formed a smaller pool. Beneš named it Čapek's Well. A large rock garden was placed on the slope not far from the well. Aside from sculptures and ceramic vases, the diversity of the garden's secluded spots was intensified by small architectural structures: Arbours and a pergola. With a sensitive touch, paths through the large area connected individual buildings with spaces for meditation and sports (a tennis court and a dock on Kozský potok [Kozský Creek]).

From 1932 to 1938, Beneš enlarged the parcel with properties he gradually purchased. With expansion, the garden gained a park-like character and natural borders. The parcel is bordered by the Lužnice River and Kozský potok on one side and the Starotáborský Forest on the other. Plantings were not only done by the gardener, but also by Hana and Edvard Beneš themselves. Gardening became one of the couple's main leisure activities.

In 1936, the so-called administrative villa was built on the edge of the property with a caretaker's apartment and the office of the president's secretary.

*Mr. and Mrs. Beneš
caring for a small
tree on the banks of
the Lužnice River,
1936*





The Tomb

Edvard Beneš chose the location of his final resting place himself. In the summer of 1947, he made no secret to friends and co-workers of his wish to be buried in his beloved garden.

Tomb of Edvard Beneš, 2009



From time immemorial, the location has been called Kazatelna [the Pulpit], because according to folk legends, Jan Hus spoke to his believers from a knoll there. Edvard Beneš also met with Prague Castle architect Pavel Janák about modifications to the space, which has a view of Sezimovo Ústí and the confluence of the Lužnice River with Kozský Creek. Janák noted that the president imagined a simple stone tomb on the knoll's rock.

According to the architect's plan, the tomb was to be located in the middle of the knoll below the villa's northwest facade. Its construction, from 1948 to 1949, was realised by the construction company of Antonín Soumar and František Koutenský of Tábor.

Opposite:

*Edvard Beneš' last path through the garden,
10 September 1948*

Edvard Beneš' funeral, 10 September 1948



In March 1950, Czech architect Pavel Janák accommodated Hana Benešová's wishes and placed a bust of Edvard Beneš at the tomb, which was created in 1947 by sculptor Karel Dvořák.

A coffin with the remains of the second president was placed in the tomb on 10 September 1948, and an urn with Hana Benešová's ashes was placed there on 6 June 1975. During Hana Benešová's life, the president's tomb was open to the public. The new owner of the property – the Office of the Presidency of the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic – closed access to the tomb in 1975. It remained in this state until 24 March 1990, when the garden gates were opened to the public once again.

In 2008, the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic decided to rehabilitate the architecture of the tomb built according to Janák's plans.



Sezimovo Ústí

This small town, laid out at the confluence of the Lužnice River with Kozský potok [Kozský Creek], was famous in the Middle Ages as a center for traders and craftsmen, and it became a well-known headquarters for supporters of Jan Hus. After it was destroyed in 1420, the Hussite community and most of its inhabitants

Overall view of Sezimovo Ústí from Mr. and Mrs. Beneš' garden, 1936





The new part of Sezimovo Ústí was built by the Bata company, 1940

migrated to nearby Hradiště Mountain, where they founded a new city – Tábor. In 1828, a new community was founded on the abandoned site, first called Starý Tábor and officially renamed in 1920 to Sezimovo Ústí. School education began in 1832, and the newly built Church of the Assumption of the Holy Cross was consecrated on 23 May 1841. When constructing their buildings, inhabitants found artifacts from the medieval settlement. The random finds compelled Josef Švehla, a local supervising teacher, to do years of archeological research, and he managed to locate the medieval city's ground plans and most of its important buildings.

After the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic, Sezimovo Ústí maintained its rural character, which was evidently why diplomats Edvard Beneš, Ludvík Strimpl and Zdeněk Fierlinger built summer homes on its outskirts in 1930 and 1931. Mr. and Mrs. Beneš especially expressed a sincere interest in their neighbours and in goings-on in the community. With financial contributions from Edvard Beneš, the settlement was electrified and a football field was also built. He was also behind the building of a bridge across Kozský potok and the regulation of its riverbed. In Beneš' era, the unexciting village near Tábor was transformed into a showpiece small town.

In 1939, Baťa strojírenský závod [Baťa Engineering Factory] built an estate of standard homes and public buildings in the vicinity, and with that, Sezimovo Ústí turned into an industrial center.

Open House Days

May–October, every last weekend of the month, 10:00–17:00

Contact: heldova.milada@vlada.cz, Tel: 224 002 254

Address: Dr. E. Beneše 201, Sezimovo Ústí

We request those interested in group tours of the villa to sign up two days before the requested date of the excursion.



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Details of the villa's original furnishings were used in the preparation of this brochure

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Office of the Government
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The Office of the Government is the central body of state administration. The Office carries out tasks connected with the expert, organisational and technical provision of the government's activities, and also provides the immediate conditions for the work of the prime minister's expert departments incorporated into its structure.

The Villa of Hana and Edvard Beneš serves as an official space for the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, and is among the buildings the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic uses to fulfil tasks connected with the government's activities. These buildings include Straka's Academy, Hrzanský Palace, Lichtenstein Palace, the Kramář Villa, a home on Slavičková Street, the Czech Consolidation Agency building and a building on Vladislavová Street.

