



THE VILLA
OF NADĚŽDA AND
KAREL KRAMÁŘ



Office of the Government
of the Czech Republic



Mr. and Mrs. Kramář in their villa's garden, 1917

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Naděžda and Karel Kramář

Karel Kramář (1860–1937) took his first study trip to Russia in 1890. During his six-month stay, he travelled the country from St. Petersburg to Moscow and on to Baku; he got to know life in both the city and in the country. Until then he had only travelled in western Europe, but his trip eastward influenced his life in many ways. Not only did he fall in love with Russia, but he also found his life partner there: Naděžda Nikolajevna Abrikosova (1862–1936).



Karel Kramář on the villa's terrace, 1917



Naděžda N. Kramářová, 1930s

His intended came from the Chlud family, wealthy Moscow merchants; the political, artistic and scientific elites of Russia met in their salon. She was first married to a wealthy candy factory owner, Alexej A. Abrikosov, and was the mother of four children. The marriage was apparently not very happy. Naděžda and her husband agreed to a divorce, which dragged on due to complications with church institutions. The marriage of Karel Kramář and Naděžda N. Abrikosova was blessed by an orthodox priest on 17 September 1900.

At the time, Karel Kramář was already an important Czech politician; he was a member of the Imperial Council and the Regional Assembly, he commented eruditely on national economics, financial and social issues, and his attention was drawn by the Austro-Hungarian Empire's foreign policy. He was found to be an excellent, always perfectly-prepared parliamentary debater. He did not on his MP's pay; he owned a weaving mill in Libštát, a brickworks in Semily and owned shares in several other companies.

In May 1915, Kramář was arrested by the monarchy and later sentenced to death for pan-Slavic propaganda. Naděžda, watched by the secret police, regularly met her husband in prison, bringing him better meals and clean clothes. Kramář received amnesty in July 1917. A national martyr, he became the chairman of the National Council, the highest domestic political institution, and, after 28 October 1918, became prime minister. He remained as prime minister only until the summer of 1919, when he was removed after

losing the election. He never became a member of the government again, and only remained the charismatic leader of the rightist nationalist National Democratic Party.

Karel Kramář's hobbies included reading, playing the piano and hunting. He provided his wife with an expensive wardrobe and accessories from leading dressmakers' salons, and gave her expensive precious stones and jewelry. At Naděžda's suggestion, he built three palatial villas. The first was finished in 1908 in the Crimea, the second, in Prague, in 1915 and the third in his birthplace, in Vysoké nad Jizerou, in 1931. The villa on the Crimea, named Barbo, was confiscated by the Bolsheviks and turned into a sanatorium for party leaders. After World War I, the houses in Bohemia became hospitable islands for many Russian refugees and emigrants, who generously helped Kramář.

Kramář loved his ambitious and somewhat moody wife dearly until his death – and so did she. Their mutual letters from the time when both were in their seventies, remain full of genuine tenderness. Perhaps this is also because they had no children together. Karel Kramář died half a year after his wife, and the couple is buried in a crypt in the Orthodox church at the Olšanský cemetery.





The Villa

For the construction of his Prague home, Karel Kramář bought property which was located on Bastion XIX, St. St. Mary Magdalene's, which made up part of the ruins of the city's fortifications. The military bastions used to be distinguished by saints' names, and they were frequently named according to church buildings nearby. The bastion, which the politician bought from the city of Prague in 1911, was named after the church dedicated as St. Mary Magdalene's, which was found in the foreland of the Svatopluk Čech Bridge.

Bastion XIX, rising out of the hulking Letna massif, offered an imposing view on to the Old Town, Vltava River and Lesser Town. The view to the historical center, and especially to Prague Castle, forced the politician to decide that the villa had to be shaped in a neo-Baroque style. Kramář asked prestigious Austrian architect Friedrich Ohmann to prepare the design; he considered Ohmann to be a sensitive artist and expert on old Prague buildings.

The villa's southern facade, 1915



*Windows of the winter garden
on the western facade, 1915*



Northern facade with the main entrance

The architect himself, as well as the decision that a private villa was to be built on one of Prague's most dominant parcels, became the subject of sharp controversy. Kramář's numerous critics rebuked both his intention to build the house in an historicist style and with elements of neo-Baroque architecture, which was considered something of the „state“ style of the monarchy. Kramář defended his intentions to build, and in the end even saw them through.

Friedrich Ohmann completed his designs in 1911, but he dealt with partial changes and extras requested by the builders until 1913. Naděžda N. Kramářová was happy to be thoroughly involved in the construction and technical details of the design, and she influenced both the architect and later the builders with her somewhat unconventional instructions.

In the spring of 1912, Karel Kramář hired the construction company of Josef Čámský to construct the building. The builder completed the rough construction of the villa and the building next to it (the residence of the driver and gardener) the following year. The building received final approval in May 1915, but craftsmen worked until 1921 on changes to the interior.

The neo-Baroque villa with Secessionist elements was built on a slightly elongated rectangular groundplan with buttresses rising from the southern and western facades. The building is covered by a Mansard roof over a decorated attic, with stylised eagles and a flowered basket. Individual facades were decorated by rich sculptural decorations which sculptor Celda Klouček



Decorative elements of the southern facade



Karel Kramář's writing table, 1938



Billiards hall, 1930s

took part in. The southern facade, situated toward the Rudolfinum, was divided with a forward balcony, on whose railing Kramář's motto was found: The truth must be against all. According to Ohmann's design, the facade was decorated with reliefs of the Czech lion, a cruiser at sea and a Russian bear. The architect designed a garden staircase in front of this facade, as well as a system of terraces with a unique view of the city. In front of the eastern facade, a garden was set according to a design by architect František Thomayer. The main entrance, covered with a storm porch, was found on the building's north side. Ohmann intentionally divided the space of the court of honour with the access road from the path, leading to the staff quarters with trellises for climbing plants. The entrance to the villa's operational section includes part of the western facade, situated toward Prague Castle.

Interior decoration was carried out according to a design by Jan Beneš, a professor at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague, and sculptors Karel Štipl and Celda Klouček. Kramář's political orientation toward Czarist Russia was mainly reflected in the topic of decoration. The main public rooms on the villa's floor was a dining room with a winter garden whose windows offer a view to Prague Castle. Karel Kramář's office was lit by windows and balcony doors situated toward the Rudolfinum. A billiards room on the ground floor was another room where Kramář received his guests. This room was lit by three stained glass doors leading to the terrace out from the eastern facade.



Stained glass in the entrance hall



Dining room with winter garden

Guest rooms, several salons, a dressing room and kitchen could also be found in the villa. The household's perfect operation was assisted not only by central heating, but also by a central vacuum and elevator.

After the death of Mr. and Mrs. Kramář, the villa was owned from 1938 by the Society of Dr. Karel Kramář, who rented it to the National Gallery, and several rooms were used as a museum. After 1948, when the organisation was forced to end its activities, the building came into the possession of the National Museum, and in 1952 came into the ownership of the Office of the Prime Minister. The building was used primarily for housing important foreign guests. In the last 50 years, the facade has been renewed, and minor construction alterations in the villa's interior have been realised. In 1967, sculptors Karel Štípl and František Pašek restored the stucco and stone decorations on the facade and roof of the building.

The Kramář villa was pronounced a cultural monument in 1991 by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic. It underwent a complete reconstruction from 1994 to 1998, so that it could serve as the residence of the prime minister of the Czech Republic. The building, with its imposing view over Prague, thus gained an appropriate and dignified use.

The general public has had the opportunity several times to visit the Czech prime minister's residence, both during open house days as well as during various cultural events.



The Gold Salon



The prime minister's office



The view from the garden over Prague's bridges

The Garden

Landscape architect František Thomayer was called upon by Karel Kramář in 1911 to prepare the design and start the garden. The garden's layout, which Thomayer sketched in 1913, dealt with planting on the entire area of the bastions of St. Mary Magdalene.

The northern entrance area and the areas in front of the villa's southern facade were designed as a regular garden with geometrical groundplan. The court of honour was limited on the northern side by the entrance path with the central grass parterre and two dominant Eastern Arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*) trees. The intimacy of the court of honour was emphasised by trellis walls with masonry columns intertwined with roses.

The eastern part of the garden was conceived of in the spirit of a natural landscape park with functionality emphasised. On one side the planting protected Mr. and Mrs. Kramář from unwanted views from Letna plain (and from Hanavský Pavilion), and on the other side it did not prevent the views from from the villa to the orchard. The panoramic view from the southern facade, which only ended somewhere around Zbraslav, had a breathtaking effect. The views from the villa's upper floors toward St. Vitus Cathedral were no less impressive. The garden's location in front of the northern side was purely functional – it created a bordered alley (currently Norway maples – *Acer platanoides* cv. *Globosum*).



1915 view of a greenhouse which was destroyed in the early 1950s



Garden in front of the eastern facade



View from the villa's terrace over the gardens

The park's section between the villa and the property's eastern border, pointed by the bastion's polygon, formed its own garden. Period photographs from the 1920s show that Thomayer preserved a group of leafy trees on the northeastern side which had to have grown before the villa's construction. A relatively wide gravel path became the basis of the connections network, which closely followed the course of the bastion's wall, which was complemented by a central, gently curving path, from which narrower functional footpaths emanated - to the tennis court, greenhouse, etc. The peripheral path around the bastions was lined by blocks of trimmed hornbeam hedge and taller evergreens. This design has been maintained, in various stages, to this day. Here the tree elements were mainly sycamore maples (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). But the paths' promenade character was emphasised by additional trees planted under Thomayer; these plantings are not so numerous at present, probably due to widespread interventions in the second half of the 20th century.

The center of the park area is today made up of a grassy parterre with a group of high trees, mainly small- and large-leaved linden (*Tilia coradata*, *T. platyphyllos*), English oak (*Quercus robur*), European white elm (*Ulmus laevis*), and occasionally European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). In the area there are also older examples of field maples roughly the same age. Yews, freely growing or trimmed into round shapes, may have been planted in a much later period, as were Japanese cherry (*Prunus serrulata*), two examples of *Ginkgo biloba*, southern catalpa

(*Catalpa bignonioides*), white fir (*Abies concolor*), rhododendrons and eastern arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis* in cultivars). From the time the garden was created, there have been an extraordinarily valuable group of stately oaks directly in front of the bastion's polygon. On the northern side of this group there are copper beech (*Fagus sylvatica f.purpurea*), and in the center of the group is a surviving English oak (*Quercus robur*). Two stately Lebanon cedars (*Cedrus libanii*) can be ranked among important trees in the context of all of Prague and its parks.

The terraces in front of the villa's southern facade were planted relatively recently. From Thomayer's original plantings, four large-leaved lindens (*Tilia platyphyllos*) remained to the west and east of the terrace, and the southwest side in the second row is complemented by Norway maples (*Acer platanoides*). On the southeast side of this field, on the lowest terrace, what is probably the oldest yew in the area can be found. In the second half of the 20th century, diverse evergreens were planted in these areas - including Lawson's cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*), along the western wall white fir (*Abies concolor*), douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), European larch (*Larix decidua*) and a group of three Serbian spruces (*Picea omorica*).

The garden never draws attention to itself and does not try to be the dominant space, but rather a silent partner. And it should remain that way in the future as well.



The garden's park-like layout



The villa's eastern facade



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Office of the Government
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The Office of the Government of the Czech Republic is the central body of state administration. The Office fulfils tasks connected with the expert, organisational and technical provision of the activities of the government, and also immediately ensures the conditions for the work of expert bodies of the prime minister and members of the government organisationally included in their structures.

The villa of Naděžda and Karel Kramář serves as a representative space for the prime minister of the Czech Republic and is among the buildings which the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic uses for the fulfilment of tasks related with the government's activities. These buildings include Straka's Academy, the Hrzánský Palace, the Lichtenstein Palace and the villa of Hana and Edvard Beneš in Sezimovo Ústí.



View from the villa's roof toward Prague Castle

