
By: Olivia Moris

University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill
Prague Summer Seminar
May 29, 2006 – June 11, 2006
Barbara Wildemuth
A national library is a library created by a government for the purpose of preserving and protecting the nation’s cultural and historical heritage. They are typically found to be the largest, most ornate and impressive examples of libraries within a country. Wikipedia defines them as “a library specifically established by the government of a nation to serve as the preeminent repository of information for that country.” (Wikipedia, 2006, Para. 1). Some of the most beautiful and historic libraries in the world are national. It could be argued that one of the oldest known libraries in the world the Library at Alexandria, was the national library of Egypt upon its conception. Whatever their historical impact, there is no doubt that they are prevalent today.

According to the Central Intelligence Agency’s World Factbook, there are 193 countries in the world in 2006 (CIA, 2006). Of those, 159 of them have a national library according to the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA, 2006). They actually count 160, including the Library of Congress, which is a debatable fit into the category.

This paper is to focus on three libraries, the National Library of the Czech Republic, or Klementinum, the National Library of Austria, and the Library of Congress. It will deal with each of their histories, some details about their collections, their functions within their country, a comparison between them, and my impressions of each during visits.

The Czech Republic has a national library, centrally located in downtown Prague. The library is commonly referred to as the Klementinum. The website devoted to the library gives a detailed breakdown of its rich history. Historical documents show that in the 11th century there existed a chapel, St. Clements, on the site where the library stands today. In 1556, the Jesuits built a university on the ruins of the chapel and named it Klementinum. From that time until 1777 the existing Charles University of Prague transferred its libraries unto the Klementinum, a
practice that still exists today. From 1773 to 1777 the Jesuits steadily abandoned the university and library, though both stayed open due to private patronage. In 1781, Karel Rafael Ungar, an historian and librarian founded the national library from the remains of the Jesuit work and instilled the practice of Prague printers filing a legal deposit copy of their work with the library. In 1807 the duty of legal deposit copy is extended to all Czech printers. 1918, the Public and University libraries are taken over by the newly founded Czechoslovakia. In 1924 the Slavic library is founded and is added to the Klementinum in 1929. In 1935 the library is renamed the National and University Library and a law is passed that requires the duty of legal deposit copy for all printed work in the country. In 1939, with the advent of the Second World War all Czech colleges and universities are closed but the library continues under the new name, Municipal and University Library. In 1958, still under communist rule, all libraries in Prague are merged into one and joined at this largest facility, under the new name State Library of the Czech Republic. It is not until 1990 that the library is given its current name, the National Library of the Czech Republic to honor its rich tradition and pay homage to its objectives. (“Library History”, 2006).

The building itself sits on nearly five acres of land in the center of Prague. According to Dr. Stanley Kalkas of Charles University, it is the largest existing structure in all of Prague, excepting the Prague Castle complex. (S. Kalkas, personal communication, May 31, 2006). The current building was originally built upon the arrival of the Jesuits in 1556. They created a complex for the pursuit of religious and university studies. The building that exists today is an amalgamation of that original complex, complete with the original Baroque wing, and was built over a long period from 1578 to 1726. It is this Baroque wing that garnered the attention of famed architectural photographer, Guillaume de Laubier, in his work on the world’s most
beautiful libraries. The National Library is depicted in this work and shows photographs of the Baroque wing. (De Laubier, Bosser, & Billington, 2003, pp. 176 - 187).

The Klementinum is a large universal library containing over 6 million volumes. At the rate that it receives new volumes it is rapidly outgrowing its current facility. The higher purpose of the Klementinum is to collect, protect, and make accessible the national cultural heritage of the Czech Republic. (Kalkas, 2006). In keeping with the purpose of most National Libraries, the Klementinum is a free public services library. It hosts over one million users annually, not counting tour groups. In addition it loans around one million items per year. It provides free services to anyone over the age of eighteen. (“About Us”, 2006).

The core of the library can be found in its reading rooms. These are the open public areas most frequently patronized by library users such as: students, teachers, academics, scientists, and scholars. In addition, the library offers inter library loan, reference services, photo duplication, digital archives of historical documents, internet and computer service, and free Wi-fi to registered library users. (“Services”, 2006).

As mentioned, the collection is at six million volumes and growing. The Klementinum adds approximately 80,000 volumes per year. It is one of the most important research libraries in all of Europe, noted primarily for its immense collection and its specific focus on Slavic cultural heritage and history. (“About Us”, 2006). In keeping with the tradition of a national library, the legal depository is housed within the complex as it has been since 1781. It is law that legal copyright be filed with the library for all Czech printers. Bearing the bulk of this duty, the library has established an automated publisher on site which produces around 16,000 volumes annually. (Kalkas, 2006).
The library has plans in the works to create an additional building not far from the existing complex. The fast growing collection has quickly outpaced itself in size. The plan is to move the bulk of the collection to the new facility and to leave the Klementinum as a public building for historical and tourism purposes. The new facility is expected to be completed by 2010 and will gain the library another 50 years of growth. Therefore, if the library continues to add to its collection at the current rate, by 2060 another new facility will have to be added to contain the entire collection. (Kalkas, 2006; “Projects and Programmes”, 2006).

The library is known as a universal research facility, though it serves many purposes and maintains many special collections. The library serves as the main university library for the Charles University, Prague campus. There is no single academic library on campus that comes close to meeting the needs of the students and so they have turned to the Klementinum to fulfill their academic requirements. (Kalkas, 2006). There is a library on site for special contemporary collections and services for all material dating after 1800. There is an historical collection for materials before 1800. There is a special collection known as the library collection that is maintained for support of the study of librarianship. The previously mention Slavic library is the largest and most well known of the special collections. The library also houses existing parts or comprehensive sets of historical libraries, including the remaining parts of Tycho Brahe’s library and the libraries of Czech historical figures Bernard Bolzano, F. X. Salda, and Jan Vlcek. Some of the comprehensive, intact libraries include the library of Count Kinsky and the Prague branch of the Lobkowitz family library. Finally, perhaps the most visited of the special library collections is the Music Library. It contains the Mozartiana, which is a memorial to the famous composer and musician and contains originals of his works. (“About Us”, 2006).
Currently, the Klementinum has many interesting projects in the works. Several of them are ongoing projects due to the influx of digitization as seen in many libraries. The Retrospective Conversion is an automation project intended to digitize the library’s old fashioned card catalogs. As with most libraries the purpose is to automate the card catalog which gives it the advantage of allowing greater accessibility. Standard paper catalogs are only accessible on site, whereas the digital version would allow for off site access to the catalog. The side benefits are that the catalog is more easily searchable and allows for cross-referencing and keyword searching. This project began in the spring of 2002 and is still in process. (“Projects and Programmes, 2002).

Another ongoing project is the Manuscriptorium. This is a very important project, dealing with the digitization of historical documents so that they can be more easily researched. Like the Retrospective Conversion, its benefits include off site access and higher search ability. An additional feature of this project is that it allows the use of old and rare texts that would otherwise be delicate to handle, limiting their use. This project was launched online in the fall of 2003 and to date more than 700,000 pages of images and full text are available from its web site. (Adolf Knoll, personal communication, May 30, 2006).

A third interesting digital project is the WebArchiv project. This concerns the digital archiving of web sites and pages. The reasoning is that many web documents contain historical and research value. However, due to the immediacy of the internet environment, very few of these items are preserved past their initial use and purpose. WebArchiv seeks to save all Czech born documents and files and preserve them for future use. They are housed within the project and searchable within the project’s database which allows them to retain their value as a research source. This project was created in the Research and Development division of the Ministry of
Culture in 2000 and has since been implemented within the National Library and is funded almost exclusively through private grants. (Jan Hutak, personal communication, May 30, 2006).

These three essential projects are only a sampling of the innovations taking place at the largest of the Czech libraries. Their future value is limitless and they, along with the standard services that are already offered, continue to make the Klementinum an important contributor to the field of librarianship.

The National Library of Austria is located in Vienna. It is born of rich history and tradition and the library of today seeks to maintain both the history and tradition in its archives. The library is the main scientific library of the Republic of Austria and regards itself as “A centre of information and research set up to provide services; the country’s excellent bank of memories; [and] a multilevel centre of education and culture.” (“Mission Statement”, 2004).

The history of the library dates back to the time of Emperor Maximilian I from the 15th century. Though, studies have shown the possibility that his forefathers created in him an interest in books and valuable written materials for collections.

The earliest records of this were of Frederick III (1440-1493). Frederick was a ruler who was greatly concerned with the cultural affairs happening within his state. He was also in possession of a large collection of manuscripts left to him by his nephew, Ladislaus Posthumus. In addition to this, the largest part of Frederick’s collection was from the private library of a Czech king, Wenceslas I, the king of Bohemia (1378-1400). This portion of the collection is distinguished by its elaborate miniatures that were created in the most famous workshops in all of Bohemia. (“National of Austria”, 2002). Based on this information, it is interesting to note
that the Czech library system, already established at this point led, indirectly, to the creation of
the imperial library of Austria.

Frederick’s personal library was comprised of more than 110 manuscripts and miniatures.
His importance in the creation of the library is honored in its national emblem which includes
“the Wenceslas Holy Scripture, a number of chrysobulls and two collections of astronomical
writings.” (“National of Austria, 2002).

The only son of Frederick was the previously mentioned founder, Maximilian I (1459-
1519). The son was not the intellectual collector that his father was, he was a humanist and
Renaissance book collector, in addition to being a writer. According to Austrian history,
Maximilian I was the first humanist to sit on the throne of Austria. He was fortunate in his
heritage to receive his father’s personal library, but even before that, his marriages brought
priceless items into his realm. His first wife, Marie of Burgundy brought a rich dowry, one-
eighth of which was books valued at 100,000 guilders (the currency of the time). His second
wife, Bianca Maria Sforza bequeathed unto him, by her dowry, priceless manuscripts that
represented Italian art and history. Upon receiving his father’s collection, Maximilian realized
his father’s dream, that the books owned by the imperial family should be in the possession of a
single person. He did not believe that his books should be kept in a single space, instead
choosing to store them in leather trunks and carry them with him, wherever he traveled. In order
to keep track of them, he appointed Conrad Celtis, a humanist from Nuremberg as the keeper of
his books. Upon his death, Maximilian ordered by his will “my books and Chronicles are to be
faithfully preserved, so that they will be found by my grandchildren.” (“National of Austria”,
2002).
Unfortunately, it is not until 1575, with the appointment of Hugo Blotius as the first librarian of the imperial library, that the dreams of Maximilian I and his father began to be realized. Blotius was required to index the holdings which consisted of more than 900 volumes and works of art. He listed them according to author, and in the case of the art, by subject heading. The library then went through a period of upheaval, where it was bought and sold several times over until the 18th century. The materials and the items that had been added in the interim came once again into the possession of the imperial court, at the hands of Emperor Charles VI (1685-1740). He commissioned a library building at what is now “Joseph’s Square” in Vienna, which exists today as the State Hall. Construction lasted from 1723 until 1726 when the building was completed, but decorating the Baroque Hall continued until 1730. In total, over 200,000 historical books and manuscripts were housed here from the 16th to the 19th century. (“History of the National Library”, 2005). This Baroque Hall, which still retains all original decorations, is also shown as one of the twenty most beautiful libraries in the world. While it is certainly only a portion of the Austrian National Library, it is the oldest existing building of the library complex. (De Laubier, et al., 2003, pp. 12-21).

While it is certainly possible to go into greater detail about the rich history of both this country and its library, doing so would be a project unto itself. Two other main points of note, the implementation of Gottfried van Swieten as prefect of the royal library, and the dissolution of the imperial family will be mentioned.

Van Swieten was prefect of the library from 1777-1803. His term is especially important, not only to the history of the National Library, but to the history of librarianship. Under his term, three hundred manuscripts, three thousand printed books, and five thousand diplomata were
incorporated into the Court Libraries holdings. Van Swieten developed a system for cataloging materials within the library. This achievement is considered to be the oldest card catalog in the history of librarianship. While there were previous catalogs rendered in libraries throughout the world, and even within the Imperial Library, Blotius’ being a notable one, they were all bound volumes. The system developed by van Swieten allowed for the incorporation of new materials or even the deletion of old ones. “The card catalogue was therefore the first technical method to allow for updating information.” (“History of the National Library”, 2005).

In 1918, the Austrian Empire officially collapsed, bringing to an end the reign of the Imperial or Court Library. It took two full years for all items to be evaluated and given over as property to the State, rendering control of the library to the government. In 1920, the library of the nation of Austria was formed, though it was not until 1945 that it was officially named as the National Library of the Republic of Austria. 1920 is an important date in the library’s history, not only because it ceased its control under the empire, but because it also began implementing the idea that, publications be reported to and supervised by the library, which is now a law for all publications within the Republic. (“History of the National Library”, 2005).

The library as it exists today is a scientific research institution. It can be used by anyone sixteen or older. However, it does have closed stacks and materials cannot be taken off the premises. Due to the severe restrictions, the library has begun offering the following services to assist those who need the library’s resources to conduct research.

There is an in house information desk used to answer general reference and collection questions. If the questions cannot be answered within a suitable time period, due to complexity of the query, there are personal consultations available during operating hours. These can be
used, also to gain knowledge on how to search the library’s databases. Another service offered is commissioned research. This service provides highly skilled professionals to develop research on materials in the library’s collection by request. “The specialists in the Research Department of the Austrian National Library [fulfil] those requests and offer at a price to take on literary research on printed materials appearing after 1850.” This service is a paid commission and can be used by any patron of the library; it is not limited to scholars or professionals. (“Research Department”, 2002).

The library’s collection is broken up into ten departments, all based around specific sectors of information. Four of them are specific museums dedicated to a portion of the immense collection. The Department of Incunabula, Old and Precious Books is housed within the historic State Hall. These are the rarest items among the holdings of the library. The world’s only globe museum, opened in 1956 is home to not only globes, but a fine rare map collection dating back to the 16th century. The Papyrus museum contains a collection of documents, some nearly 3000 years old, from ancient Egypt that are on permanent display. And the Esperante museum “accommodates the biggest collection of artificial languages in the world and a linguistic research library for language planning.” (“Museums”, 2005). These four segments make up the main facilities of the library compound. There are six other departments that are incorporated throughout that balance the collection. They are: Department of Broadsheets, Posters and Ex Libris, Department of Manuscripts, Autographs and Closed Collections, Department of Music, Austrian Literary Archives, Picture Archive, and Archives of Austrian Folk Song Institute. (“Collections”, 2005).
In total, the Library and its museums contain over seven million items from Ancient Egypt up to the modern day. This vast collection is not only a literary and historical treasure, but according to the library it “conserves an important part of the world's written cultural heritage and feels a duty to guard that permanently.” (“About Us”, 2004).

The library’s web page is an excellent resource for finding out more about this awesome institution that is equal parts library and museum. The site does contain a page of information about projects the library is currently involved in, but it is written entirely in German, with no translation available. However, regardless of the future concerns of this library, it is likely that they will be no less inspiring than its undertakings in the past.

The final installment of this whirlwind tour of three of the world’s most beautiful and distinguished libraries leads us back to the United States. Located in the heart of the nation’s capital, The Library of Congress stands out in many regards, but none as noticeable as its immense size. It is the single largest library in the world, “with more than 130 million items on approximately 530 miles of bookshelves. The collections include more than 29 million books and other printed materials, 2.7 million recordings, 12 million photographs, 4.8 million maps, and 58 million manuscripts.” (“Welcome Message from the Librarian”, 2006).

The sheer volume of a library this size makes it hard to tackle, but even harder to ignore. No discussion on libraries could be complete without a mention of this national gem. While the history of the Library of Congress is certainly illustrious to Americans, it pales somewhat in comparison to the European counterparts mentioned previously. By dint of age, the newness of this country makes for a somewhat shorter tale than the condensed versions given to the other two library examples.
The library began its history in 1800 with an act of Congress that provided for the moving of the seat of government from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to the newly founded Washington, D.C. President John Adams signed the bill, which included a provision to create a library for Congress only. The bill also included appropriations of $5,000 to establish this new facility. The library was created and housed within the United States Capitol building until August of 1814. At that time, invading British forces set fire to the building, and burned whatever of the library collection they did not keep for themselves.

Within one month after this unfortunate desecration, former president Thomas Jefferson offered to Congress his own personal library as a replacement. At the time, Jefferson’s library was considered to be one of the most exhaustive and impressive libraries in the country. He anticipated that there might be some murmurs of discontent over his personal library and the Library of Congress reports that:

In offering his collection to Congress, Jefferson anticipated controversy over the nature of his collection, which included books in foreign languages and volumes of philosophy, science, literature, and other topics not normally viewed as part of a legislative library. He wrote, "I do not know that it contains any branch of science which Congress would wish to exclude from their collection; there is, in fact, no subject to which a Member of Congress may not have occasion to refer." ("About/History", 2006).

It was not until January of the following year, 1815 that Congress accepted Jefferson’s generous offer and funded the purchase of the Jefferson library with appropriations of $23,950 which bought the entire collection of 6,487 items.

It is from this purchase that the foundation was laid for a great legislative library in the United States. Jefferson believed in a spirit of universality in regard to education. He strongly encouraged that no subject be denied representation in the legislative library and it is this policy
that still, today, drives the collection development practices at the Library of Congress. The library’s exact mission statement is as follows:

The library’s mission is to make its resources available and useful to the Congress and the American people and to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for future generations. (“Mission, Strategic Plan”, 2006).

Even in their most current revision of the statement, the library still includes the word “universal” as a nod to the Jeffersonian plan for the library.

Ainsworth Rand Spofford was the Librarian of Congress from 1864 – 1897 and he was responsible for building it into the institution as we know it today. He established the copyright act of 1870 which requires anyone applying for copyright to submit two copies of their work to the Library of Congress. This is a similar theory to the publications law of the Austrian National Library and the legal deposit copy of the Klementinum. However, it was this act that caused a flood of materials into the library at an alarming rate. Spofford managed to convince Congress of the desperate need for more space and in 1873 they authorized the plans for a new building. The Library of Congress building that exists today opened to the public on November 1, 1897. “It was hailed as a glorious national monument and ‘the largest, the costliest, and the safest’ library building in the world.” (“About/History”, 2006). It is interesting to note that the library was hailed as large, expensive, and safe, with no mention of beauty. Fortunately, Guillaume de Laubier assessed this structure with a different eye. It too can be found among the pages of his monument to libraries of the world as one of the most beautiful. (De Laubier, et al., 2003, pp. 216-225).

The Library of Congress functions as a branch of the United States government. It is the principal library for the legislative body, though it does duty as a public library as well. Though
books may only be used on site, unless by a member of the United States Congress, it is open to anyone above high school age without payment or special permission and it bills itself as “the world's largest library and a great resource to scholars and researchers.” (“FAQ’s”, 2006). The library is comprised of several divisions including, the Office of the Librarian, Congressional Research Service, U. S. Copyright Office, Law Library of Congress, Office of Strategic Initiatives and Library Services. (“General Information”, 2006).

The library’s collection, already noted for its immense size is continuously growing. Each day, approximately 22,000 items are taken in by the library and roughly 10,000 are added to the collection. The majority of items that are presented to the library come from the U. S. Copyright Office. Items can also be selected through the library’s collection development policies, purchasing materials, receiving donations or gifts to the library, or through exchange with other institutions at home and abroad. The items that are not selected to be added to the collection are used to enhance the exchange program that the library participates in with other libraries and comparable institutions both nationwide and international. Those still unselected are offered throughout the government and then for educational and non-profit purposes. (“Fascinating Facts”, 2005).

Important items to note of the impressive collection: the first extant printed book in North America, the Bay Psalm book, the oldest example of printing in the world; passages from a Buddhist Sutra (770 A.D.), and a cuneiform tablet; the library’s oldest written work (2040 B.C.). The smallest book in the library’s collection is Old King Cole, which measures 1/25” by 1/25”, reported to be about the size of the period at the end of this sentence. Its pages can be turned, but
only by using a needle. The largest book in the library’s collection is John James Audubon’s
Birds of America, which stands 1 meter high (39.37”). (“Fascinating Facts”, 2005).

The library supports many projects that would be worthwhile to note, though constraints
prohibit telling of them all. As with many other major institutions, there is an ongoing
digitization project called American Memory. This project represents the multimedia versions of
the items that have thus far been digitized. Unfortunately, only the smallest fraction of available
items has been through this process. (“Digital Collections and Programs”, 2006).

Another, related project is digital preservation. In 1998, the library began to develop a
strategy that would collect, preserve, and protect the vast amounts of digital and online
information within its disposal. The ongoing purpose of the project is to preserve the information
to keep it available and useful for future generations. (“Digital Preservation”, 2006).

Finally, in June of 2002, the Library of Congress established its own “Ask a Librarian”
program. Eighteen of the library’s subject specific reading rooms currently participate. This
allows people anywhere in the world to access the home page and click on the “Ask a Librarian”
link. Any question may be sent in via email and the questions may be further specialized by
sending them to whichever of the participating reading rooms they feel may be most likely to
facilitate the response. (“Digital Reference”, 2006).

The Library of Congress is not only a national treasure, but a world wide leader in
information and library services. Its web site is full of useful information and links, in addition to
wonderful services. The site itself is so in-depth that it could command a research paper entirely
unto its own.
These three amazing libraries have been detailed to give a better understanding of their functions, their collections, and their individual histories. It is interesting to note some of the primary ideas that draw them together under one heading and those items which separate them.

The national libraries of Austria and the Czech Republic have banded together, along with seventeen other national libraries throughout Europe to launch a counteroffensive to the Google Scholar project. The project was intended to scan the collections of several major libraries and digitize the contents to make the information available on a worldwide scale. The plan proposed by the European libraries would digitize European heritage and make it available to those using international web engines. The basis was to stop what was seen as cultural domination by Americans. By launching their own version of Google Scholar they would theoretically halt the flood of Europeans flocking to use the American database. (Albanese, 2005).

Another major similarity is that all three of them are participating in digitization projects. Both digitizing written work and preserving web archives. This similarity is likely one that all three libraries share with most other libraries worldwide.

One of the major differences that can be noted among the libraries is their source of funding. The Austrian National Library gets their funding primarily from the Austrian government, but they do accept corporate sponsorship for special projects. Many of their corporate sponsors listed are written in German, but a couple of them were banking institutions. (“Partners and Sponsors”, 2005).

The Czech National Library, the Klementinum, is the irregular member of the group. They, like the Austrian National Library, do accept sponsors for special projects, though they
also allow private researchers to sponsor specific research, which is different. They also accept one annual contribution that constitutes their major partner for the year. For the year 2006, the major contributor is Budejovicky Budvar, the largest brewing corporation in the Czech Republic. (“Sponsorship”, 2006). This is a major departure from anything you might find in the United States. Most Americans would probably be appalled if they walked into any library and saw “The Summer Reading Program, sponsored by Budweiser”. It seems that Americans are more rigid in their propriety than Europeans.

Finally, the Library of Congress is fully funded by the United States government. However, they do accept private donations of both materials and financial gifts. They do not allow for sponsorship or partnership to fund programs, instead relying on government appropriations and generous donations. (“Development Office”, 2006).

The largest difference between them is that the libraries of Austria and the Czech Republic are both national libraries in their respective countries. Perhaps, not as noticeable, but the Library of Congress is not. The United States government does not support a national library, instead using the Library of Congress to fulfill those functions. However, as is stated right in the name, the Library of Congress is not a national library, it is the library reserved for the use of Congress. While on the surface it fits all of the components, located in the nation’s capital, free and open to the public (with some restrictions), guardian of the copyright and printing industry of the nation, still, the Library of Congress is the glaring exception to the category of this paper. However, given its status within the United States, it is the closest example to be found. And certainly worth an in depth look, like the Klementinum and the Austrian National Library.
In comparison of the missions and functions of each of these libraries it is easy to see the remarkable similarities. The primary differences of note fall under the category of funding. It is likely that when building a national library complex, a government draws on the ideas and strengths of libraries that have come before. Likely, as well, that as the years pass, the heads of these libraries have made changes based on the work of other librarians and the trends happening in the industry. So while it would be amusing to speculate where these libraries could draw from one another to improve their own establishments, given the similarities found, it seems probable that is exactly what they do.

I am fortunate to have had the chance to visit each of these three libraries. During an academic trip to the Czech Republic, my group was provided with a private tour of the national library. The thing that struck me most when visiting the Klementinum was the diverse areas we were shown. We saw a private chapel on the grounds that is used for concerts at the library and is part of a tribute to Mozart. The Baroque library, no longer used, was shown to us on the tour; we stood in a room with thousands of books, many of which were older than the United States. It was a rather awe-inspiring opportunity. I was overwhelmed by the number of amazing artifacts on display. In the historic parts of the library there is more of a museum feel than you would expect. Not having visited historic libraries before, I was unprepared for that aspect.

Our tour also included a trek up 187 rickety steps to the Klementinum bell tower. Roughly around halfway to the top, we stopped in a spacious chamber where a perfectly straight line extended from one side to the other. We learned that was a line of longitude running through the complex and the heart of Prague. They originally used that line to tell the exact time and the men paid to watch the sunlight move across the line would ring bells to denote the hours of the
day; which is how the bell tower came to be. At the very top of the tower is a balcony that extends around the outside of all four walls of the tower. This provided a view of the entire city of Prague from all angles.

Eventually, we did make it into the most used portions of the library where we learned much of the services that are offered. Walking into one of the reading rooms, I was immediately struck by how universal libraries are. Though I do not speak the language, standing in that room I felt that I could be in any library in the world. Students, researchers, academics, scholars, and anyone else, were using the materials and resources available to them, bustling around in relative quiet so as to not disturb the others. (Personal memoirs and visit, May 31, 2006).

During the same trip, I made a weekend visit to Vienna. It seemed to me that while there, I might as well take to opportunity to visit the Austrian National Library. For a small fee, I was able to access the State Hall. While certainly a worthwhile venture, it did not inspire me as much as the trip to the Klementinum. Perhaps, it was the lack of the guided tour, or perhaps it was the museum like feel of the area. I did enjoy wandering around and viewing the impressive architecture and artwork on display, but most of the materials in the room were set out on display to maximize viewing. While there is nothing wrong with this idea, there is something to be said for wandering through a library and stumbling across a personal gem. There were no opportunities for that in this portion of the library, though I will certainly grant that it is an impressive display of old and rare books and artifacts.

After leaving the State Hall, I noticed another entrance for the Globe and Esperante museums. Mostly out of curiosity, I wandered in, though I really had no desire to see another library cum museum. To my delight, I found myself at the entrance to the library facility. I went
in through the front door on a Saturday morning and once again found myself transported to any library. There were people everywhere, bustling about or sitting still on computers, while others were ensconced in corners, reading books and newspapers. This part of the facility was much more modern and there were no obvious displays of heritage, or famous artwork or glass cases of special books. I was thrilled to have the chance to view the people hard at work or play in their National Library. To me, that was the whole reason for stopping by. (Personal memoirs and visit, June 3, 2006).

Finally, while working toward the completion of my Masters in Library Science, I have been attending the Catholic University of America (CUA). CUA is located in the northeast quadrant of the District of Columbia. One of the major draws of this school is that it is located in what might feasibly be referred to the Mecca of Libraries. During my very first semester in this city I managed a trip to the Library of Congress. The public tour, while free, is the equivalent of visiting Austria’s State Hall with a tour guide. The public tour is designed to show off the historical and important aspects of the building. There is very little reference to or showing of the heart of this facility, its library. Certainly, this concept is mentioned, especially in reference to the collection and the immense size of the library, but the focus of the tour is on the architectural value of the building, the historical importance of the library, and the Treasure Gallery, where special items are encased in little glass boxes.

While I would recommend this tour to anyone visiting the city, one of the benefits of living here is the chance to go to the library itself. I have wandered in and among the many reading rooms in the heart of the library and have watched as others study and research important material. People always manage to look important and busy in Washington, perhaps as a result of
the important business and politics taking place here, regardless, I am certain that some of these people were in the Library of Congress for the same reason I was, to enjoy its atmosphere. Though my visits to this library took place before my trip overseas, I have gone back since. Having seen other impressive libraries and being given this chance to compare, I was immediately struck by that comforting sense that a library is universal. I know that the Library of Congress was founded upon the Jeffersonian ideal of universality, with regard to education and academics, but perhaps he was subliminally creating the atmosphere as well. (Personal memoirs and visit; fall 2005 and September 13, 2006).

I cannot say for sure if my comfort and familiarity in libraries stems from my career as a librarian or from my love of libraries. Perhaps the average citizen or student would not feel the same sense of universality in any library of this world, but I think he/she would. The people I observed all had that same look about them, that they were in a place of understanding, where they were free to enjoy and improve their lives through learning. If the citizens of Austria, the Czech Republic, and the United States all feel the same about their home libraries, it follows that they would feel the same in each other’s libraries as well. And what a comforting thought that is.

The libraries covered in this work, the National Library of the Czech Republic, the National Library of Austria, and the Library of Congress are incredible facilities. They serve as guardians of their individual nations’ treasures and collective memories. They protect the truths of what has gone before and preserve the right for the future to learn from the past. They are home to books, manuscripts, magazines, journals, newspapers, and other artifacts. They are museums that pay homage to the art and architectural history of the nation. Their beauty and
their importance cannot be dismissed nor denied. With luck, these glorious monuments to
memory and education will last for many more hundreds of years to come.

Yet, after all is said and done, they are still libraries. They are buildings of learning and
academia. On a Saturday morning at any of these facilities you will find those who are reading
the paper to catch up on the world. You will find the students, rushing to complete that paper so
they can enjoy the weekend. You will find the average citizen who knows exactly how the
library fits into their life and how easy it is to be there and get exactly what you need. Their role
is defined by the people who visit. That is the beauty of a library, national or otherwise.


