

Mila Rechcigl Presented a Life Achievement Medal

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On the occasion of the SVU Annual Champagne Reception at the Czech Embassy in Washington, DC, on **September 29, 2012**, Ambassador Petr Gandalovič presented the Past SVU President Míla Rechcigl, a medal for his life contributions to the Czech archival science. The medal was awarded by the Minister of Interior of the Czech Republic Jan Kubice.



Although Dr. Rechcigl has been named to the position of SVU archivist in 2007, he had been involved in the field of archival science for many years before that. For decades, he maintained the official Society files which had been recently deposited at the University of Minnesota's IHRC archives. In addition, he wrote, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of SVU, his personal account of history of SVU, under the title *On Behalf of their Homeland. Fifty Years of SVU* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2008). This was a monumental undertaking which mirrors the lives, aspirations and achievements of the Czechoslovak intelligentsia abroad, including the political exiles from Czechoslovakia after 1948 and 1968. The Czech version was subsequently published under the title *Pro vlast. Padesát let Společnosti pro vědy a umění (SVU)*. (Praha: *Academia*, 2012).

He was also instrumental in establishing the National Heritage Commission with the aim of preserving Czech and Slovak cultural heritage in America. Under its aegis, he has undertaken a comprehensive survey of Czech-related historic sites and archival materials in the US. Based on this survey, he has prepared a detailed listing, *Czech-American Historic Sites, Monuments, and Memorials* which was published through the courtesy of Palacký University in Olomouc (2004). The second part of the survey, bearing the title *Czechoslovak American Archivalia*, was also published, as a two-volume-set, by Palacký University in 2004.

In this connection, he also organized several important conferences relating to Czech and Slovak Americans and their contributions to the US, one in Texas in 1997, the second in Minnesota (1999), the third in Nebraska (2001), another in Iowa (2003) and the fifth in Florida (2005).

Through his initiative, a special "Working Conference on Czech & Slovak American Archival Materials and their Preservation" was held at the Czech and Slovak Embassies in Washington, DC in November 2003. It was an exceptionally successful conference which led to the establishment of the new Czech & Slovak American Archival Consortium (CSAAC). The conference was co-sponsored by the US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad. Proceedings of the Conference was published in the book form, under the title *Czech and Slovak American Archival Materials and their Preservation* (Prague: Prague Edition Ltd., 2004), with the financial support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Beyond that, Mila Rechcigl is considered an authority on the Czech and Slovak immigration to America from the Czech Lands and Slovakia and on the cultural history of Czech and Slovak Americans. He has written numerous publications in this area, including *Postavy naší Ameriky* (Personalities of our America) (Praha: Pražská edice, 2000), *Czechs and Slovak Americans* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2005) and *Tam za tím mořem piva aneb Naše Amerika jak ji kdo málo zná* (Beyond the sea of beer or Our America as only a few individuals know it) is in press.

In his acceptance speech, Míla Rechcigl voiced concern about the state and uncertain fate of Czech and Slovak archival materials in America, pointing out that the majority of the documents are still in private hands and that there is an imminent danger that they may be destroyed or discarded, unless they are placed in permanent repositories. He made a plea to those present, as well as to Czech and Slovak ethnic organizations, to get involved in the effort to preserve the Czech and Slovak cultural heritage in America, which reflects the life, the struggles, the work and the accomplishments of our ancestors and other immigrants and the exiles from the territory of former Czechoslovakia.