

70 YEARS OF THE BUILDING OF THE NATIONAL BANK OF SLOVAKIA'S BRANCH IN BANSKÁ BYSTRICA

Ing. Jozef Kreutz
The NBS Branch Office Banská Bystrica

The seat of the Banská Bystrica Branch of the National Bank of Slovakia in the historical centre of the city will also serve the needs of this financial institution in the third millennium. The conditions suitable for the coming 20 to 30 years have been created by the most recent reconstructions of the building in the years 1992 to 1995. When an independent Slovak Republic was being created, a new safekeeping place, the largest in Slovakia, was added.

All the offices are equipped with the latest technology, automatic cash processing machines. There are more than 120 people working in the branch's head office and its four sub-branches in Liptovský Mikuláš, Žilina, Prievidza and Lučenec. The employees of sub-branches chiefly perform tasks relating to the state budget and also

partly execute cash transactions. There is a plan to build safekeeping premises in Žilina and Lučenec sub-branches next year.

The building in Banská Bystrica was constructed according to the design of Professor Ladislav Skřivánek from Prague. Over the course of 70 years, the said premises always only housed a certain banking sub-



The building of the NBS Branch in Banská Bystrica



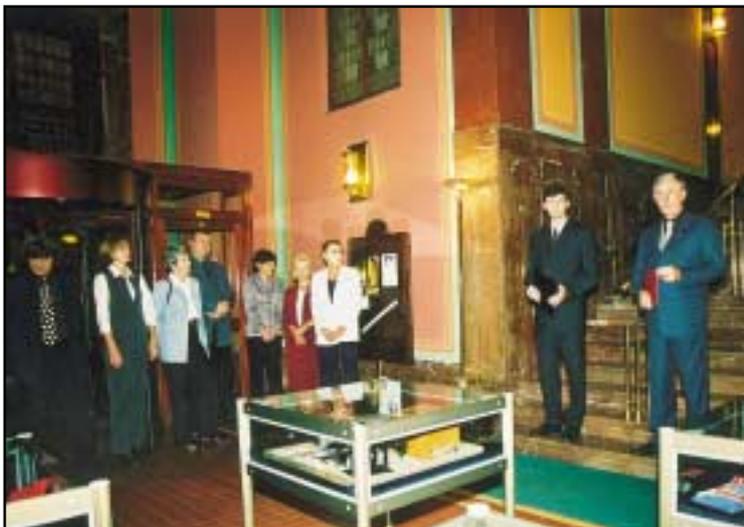
Detail of the second storey above ground

division, namely the NBČS agency since 1939, and later on, an agency of the Slovak National Bank (SNB). A significant landmark in the history of this building was the operation of the SNB Head Office, which performed the function of the central bank for the insurrection territory following the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising. At the same time, precious metals were placed in its strong-rooms, which later on were transferred abroad. After the World War II, the building served as the NBČS agency again up until the formation of the Czechoslovak State Bank (ŠBČS) in 1950, which assumed all the tasks from the preceding banks.

Banks wrote the history of this building up until the year 1985, at which time a new ŠBČS branch was bu-

ilt, and the building was rebuilt to suit the needs of the Regional Administration. But the development in the banking sector took a slightly different direction and from January 1, 1990 through to the year 1992 the building housed the ŠBČS branch again.

From January 1, 1993 onwards it has been the seat of the National Bank of Slovakia' Branch.



The Exhibition 70 Years of the Building of the NBS Branch in Banská Bystrica was opened by the Branch Director Ing. Jozef Kreutz on August 15, 2002

Bystrica was most favourably located in terms of geography and best equipped with strong-rooms. In this way, the agency in Banská Bystrica became the headquarters for the insurrection territory.

A notable figure was Karol Markovič (1897 – 1980), the head of the Banská Bystrica agency, who in 1944 also held the office of the director-in-chief of the insurrection banking headquarters. He was involved in the transfer of precious metals from Kremica to Banská Bystrica, as

well as the transfer of gold supplies from Banská Bystrica to Switzerland. In the following years, the building and the employees working there still had an important role to play, whether in the currency reforms of 1945 and 1953, or other significant reforms.

A great deal of organizational change necessitated frequent reconstructions and relocations of individual working sites. This was reflected in the deteriorating and dismal condition of the building. However, thanks to

The processing of banknotes in the SNB in 1940

An example of modern banknote processing using semi-automatic machines ISS 300 PS

On August 15, 2002, seventy years had passed since the opening of the building of the NBS Branch in Banská Bystrica. This stately building was built as an agency of the Czechoslovak National Bank in a record-breaking time of 2 years. The building was erected by Slovensko-česká účastinná stavebná spoločnosť (the Slovak-Czech Joint-Stock Building Company) Banská Bystrica according to the design of Professor Ladislav Skřivánek. In designing this building he drew inspiration from motifs found in Tuscany, northern Italy, which is something unparalleled and unique in our architecture.

In giving his opinion on this building, another author, Ladislav Foltýn, states in the monograph entitled *Slovak Architecture and the Czech Avant-Garde in 1918 – 1939*: “Ladislav Skřivánek considered Renaissance, and the Tuscan Palace in particular, as a starting point for the national architecture. To it he devoted his entire life. The whole structure, not only its appearance, has been designed in this spirit”.

During the whole 70 years, the building exclusively served banking needs.

The building played an important role at the time of the Slovak National Uprising. Considerable supplies of legal tender were transferred to its strong-rooms, since the agency in Banská





Display of older banking devices

the last reconstruction of the building dating back to 1992 – 1995, really good preconditions were created for performing the tasks in the years to come. In terms of the technology available, the building was significantly upgraded, and the third safe-keeping place was completed. At the same time, the historic nature of the building was preserved, which is in accordance with the Act on Protection of National Heritage, since the building is listed on the roster of cultural monuments of the Slovak Republic under reference number 10010.

The exterior and interior of the building is distinguished by a vast number of extraordinary decorative features and details. On the façade of the building, colourful Slovak emblems together with the stylish inscriptions “NBČ” will immediately arrest one’s attention. There is a tall oak door comprising 1932 rivets in the arched part of the structure to symbolize the year of completion of the structure. The door handles are cast of brass in the shape of a lying lion. The materials used in the exterior of the building are natural, noble, exhibiting extraordinary sense of detail and high-quality handicraft rendering.

The author used notably the space on the façade to express a number of interesting ideas.

From among several quotations, I shall pick only one:

“To work and save
measure and believe
love and hope”.

All the visitors are captured by the dark-red marble lining in the interior of the building, which, in addition to a small entrance space has also been used in the heightened basement and other stairways. Behind a modern revolving door there is an entrance hall with painted ceiling and walls painted in stripes.

The articulated hall and staircase end in a marble amp-hora of ochreous colour, which also symbolizes the banking institution. It is interesting that the individual steps of a three-flight staircase are separately embedded in the ou-

ter wall as brackets. The railing is fitted with a brass coat-of-arms. Lighting is provided by atypical brass lighting fixtures.

As for other premises, the board room – the former bank’s agency – as well as the director’s office with girder ceiling of reinforced concrete – are of a highly interesting and meticulous design. To maintain such a building in serviceable condition while complying with all the conservationists’ requirements causes no small troubles. Especially during repair and reconstruction work we had to bear in mind one goal above all – for the building in the third millennium to be modern and functional, while also preserving the cultural heritage.

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the opening of the building of the NBS

Branch in Banská Bystrica we prepared a retrospective exhibition presenting a number of documents picturing the plentiful and manifold activities over the past 70 years, as well as many reconstructions and historical milestones.

The exhibits themselves are displayed on 8 panels and in 4 display cases, with the bottom part of each panel showing banknotes which were legal tender at the time in question.

Besides coins and various medals, there are also three-dimensional objects used in banking operations – a coin counter, a special letter scale, or “wake” clock – on show in the display-cases. A distinct exhibit in the display is a franking machine dating back to 1993, which was used for other fee stamping.

Another event on the opening day was the unveiling in the board room of the branch of the picture of M. R. Štefánik, made by Viliam Ruttkay – Nedecký, a painter from Banská Bystrica in the 1930s. For many years, except for two brief periods, this picture was held in the branch’s depository. Over the period of 1997 – 2001 the picture was lent to the Slovak Embassy in Paris, where it played an important role in the Slovak-French relationships. In this way we have at least squared up a bit with the colossus, since also in the pre-war period the entrance hall of the Banská Bystrica branch was decorated with a statue of M. R. Štefánik.

And what will the future bring to us?

It is not easy to answer this question. Already today it is possible to say that in terms of technology and other equipment, the building of the NBS branch in Banská Bystrica is ready to satisfy the needs of the central bank in the coming 20 – 30 years. We possess modern technical equipment to wholly administer the supplies, sufficient safe-keeping capacities and, as a matter of course, a high-quality team of employees able to perform the tasks of the central bank even after the integration into the European system of central banks.

Photo: Ing. Ján Šperka