

Rose Business — Emotion Business. Promotion of Jan Böhm's Garden Centre in Blatná between the World Wars



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Despite his high popularity in interwar Czechoslovakia,¹ the entrepreneur and breeder Jan Böhm is almost unknown today. Brief mentions of his company can be found in most specialist works on the history of horticulture, whether they are publications of the Svaz školkařů České republiky (Association of Nurserymen of the Czech Republic),² studies on the history of horticulture published by the Národní zemědělské museum (National Museum of Agriculture), scripts of the Mendel University in Brno,³ or bachelor's and master's theses also from the Mendel University.⁴ In 2017, the National Museum of Agriculture published an important publication on the history of horticulture in the interwar period; Jan Böhm also has a place here, but again it is only a brief biography.⁵ The only monograph devoted to this Blatná entrepreneur comes

- 1 It is a modified version of the text Veronika Jungmannová, *Obchod růžemi — obchod emocemi. Propagace zahradnictví Böhm v Blatné mezi světovými válkami*, *Hospodářské dějiny* 35, 2020, no. 2, pp. 233–247. Translation was carried out at Charles University as part of the PROGRES Q09: *Historie — Klíč k pochopení globalizovaného světa* (PROGRES Q09: *History — The Key to Understanding a Globalised World*).
- 2 Petr Salaš — Jiří Veleba — Václav Truhlář — Marie Horáková, *100 let česko-slovenského školkařství 1919–2019: almanach Svazu školkařů ČR* (100 years of Czech-Slovak Nursery 1919–2019: *Almanac of the Association of Nurserymen of the Czech Republic*), Olomouc 2019.
- 3 Petr Salaš — Jan Lužný, *Stručná historie zahradnictví I* (Brief History of Horticulture I), Brno 2006.
- 4 E.g. Tereza Matoušková, *Významná rozária České republiky* (Significant Rosaries of the Czech Republic), Bachelor thesis, Mendel University in Brno, Faculty of Horticulture, Lednice 2010; Anna Štechová, *Růže z Blatné — historie a současnost* (Roses from Blatná — History and Present), Diploma thesis, Mendel University in Brno, Faculty of Horticulture, Lednice 2003.
- 5 Šárka Steinová — Roman Zámečník — Stanislava Ottomanská, *Zahradní umění první Československé republiky a její zahradníci* (Garden Art of the First Czechoslovak Republic and her Gardeners), Praha 2017.



from regional researcher Jiří Sekera, “Böhm — růže — Blatná”.⁶ Although this publication is dedicated to the personality and business of Jan Böhm, it mainly deals with a relatively detailed genealogy and other personalities of the Böhm family and a description of rose varieties. However, two smaller studies published by Jan Štemberk are worthy of attention.⁷ They draw mainly on Böhm’s own memoirs published in the book “Jak jsem začínal”.⁸ Since the company archive has not survived, Böhm’s memoirs, remain the key source in this study, however confronted with numerous articles in the press. His achievements are documented by commemorative certificates and medals from competitions deposited in the Městské museum Blatná (Blatná Municipal Museum) and rose varieties can be traced on several websites devoted to rose breeding⁹ and in the surviving catalogues of Böhm — Růže — Blatná.

Jan Böhm was born in 1888 into a horticultural family. His father, Jan Nepomuk Böhm, from whom the future rose grower also trained, was a well-known Prague gardener. In his Vinohrady nurseries/garden centre, he devoted himself mainly to the breeding and cultivation of bulbs, especially hyacinths. His younger son, Čestmír Böhm, Jan’s brother, was also a horticulturist and founded a rock gardening business in Malešice.

During the First World War, Jan Böhm was deployed on the Russian front and, after being seriously wounded, as a caretaker of a military garden near Vienna. After the war, he acquired nearly two hectares of land from his father near the South Bohemian town of Blatná, where he married and started his own business.¹⁰ In 1921, he sold his first rose bushes and a year later won his first award — a silver medal at the Brno Trade Fairs,¹¹ while in the 1930s roses bred by him were successful at many

6 Jiří Sekera, *Böhm — růže — Blatná (Böhm — Roses — Blatná)*, Blatná 2013.

7 Jan Štemberk, *Blatenský „Baťa v růžích“*. *Velkopěstitel růží Jan Böhm (‘Baťa in Roses’ from Blatná. Large-Scale Grower of Roses Jan Böhm)*, Jihočeský sborník historický 80, České Budějovice 2011, pp. 99–108; Jan Štemberk, *Velkopěstitel růží Jan Böhm: příspěvek ke zkoumání hospodářských elit (Large-Scale Grower of Roses Jan Böhm: Contribution to Investigation of Economic Elites)*, In: *Genius loci českého jihu: 2006, 2012*, České Budějovice 2015, pp. 107–113.

8 *Jak jsem začínal: vzpomínky Tomáše Bati, Jana Böhma, Václava Klementa, Bedřicha Kočího, Františka Otty (How I Started: Memoirs of Tomáš Baťa, Jan Böhm, Václav Klement, Bedřich Kočí, František Otta)*, prepared for the press by Petr Čermák, Brno 1938. However, this is not the only source of the breeder’s memories. A short reflection on his own business was included in every anniversary catalogue of roses that Bohm’s company published for the fifth, tenth, fifteenth, and twentieth anniversaries of the company’s foundation. These reminiscences do not contradict each other in principle, but rather complement each other. They paint a picture of the early days of Böhm’s business as he used them to build his image as a self-made man.

9 *Růže v ČR* [online]. Available from: <http://ruze.wi.cz/> [cited 2020-10-07]. See also: *Roses, Clematis and Paeonies* [online]. Available from: <https://www.helpmefind.com/gardening/l.php?l=6.6182&tab=21> [cited 2020-10-07].

10 See *Jak jsem začínal: vzpomínky Tomáše Bati, Jana Böhma, Václava Klementa, Bedřicha Kočího, Františka Otty*, do tisku připravil Petr Čermák, Brno 1938.

11 From 1821, regular trade fairs were held in Brno. In 1888, Brno hosted the Imperial Jubi-



Jan Böhm (Source: Dvacet let
československých růží,
Blatná 1938)



European exhibitions. Rose exhibitions were held annually at the so-called trial rosaries.¹² At that time, the most important rosaries were located in Bagatelle near Paris,

lee Exhibition, and the tradition of Brno trade fairs (Brněnské výstavní veletrhy) began in 1922. In 1927–1928, the Brno Exhibition Centre was built. According to the official website of BVV Trade Fairs Brno [online]. Available from: <https://www.bvv.cz/veletrhy-brno/spolecnost/historie/> [cited 2020-10-30].

- ¹² Trial rosarium, nowadays “competition rosarium”; gardens designed for the evaluation of rose cultivars. “The evaluation of roses is based on their systematic valuation according to a number of predetermined professional criteria. It is not just the expected aesthetic parameters such as colour or scent that are considered, but also, for example, the foliage and the resistance of the roses to fungal diseases. Individual cultivars are monitored over a period of several years after they are planted. The rosarium has a permanent expert committee whose members regularly monitor and evaluate the roses.” See Internation-



in Saverne in north-western France, in Rome, or in Sangerhausen in Germany.¹³ Most of these rosaries were established in the second half of the 19th century and by this time were already growing thousands of rose varieties.

The rose nursery in Blatná started with two hectares of fields. Ten years later, the rose plantations covered approximately 4.5 hectares¹⁴ of land, the former cement factory had been converted into a packing house,¹⁵ and by 1934 the enterprise had 25 hectares of land,¹⁶ 33 permanent employees,¹⁷ and employed over 70 seasonal workers. By 1928, Jan Böhm had a large villa built in what was then Fügnerova (now Böhmová) Street, which housed his apartment, offices, and several employee flats. Böhm began to build an exhibition rosarium in the garden. The villa was directly adjacent to the ever-expanding grounds of Böhm's plantations. During the 1930s, a large rose store was built.¹⁸

Böhm had chosen a field of business that was most uncertain. Agriculture and horticulture are extremely dependent on many external influences. Basically everything was stacked against Böhm: the soil around Blatná is not of very good quality,¹⁹ the land he acquired was rocky, and the local landscape is influenced by the cold Šumava (Bohemian Forest) weather.²⁰ At the same time, from the very beginning he specialised in one type of flower, which is not quite common in a relatively small and highly competitive market like the Czechoslovak market. Only large foreign companies with a sufficiently large customer base could and still can afford to specialise in a single type of plant. Böhm was competing with a number of larger or smaller companies, many of which were already established from the pre-war period, which

al Rosarium Competition Hradec Králové [online]. Available from: <http://www.rosaklub.cz/Soutezni-rozarium/O-rozariu> [cited 2020-06-28]. The only international competition rosarium in the Czech Republic is located in Hradec Králové — Kukleny. One of the oldest competition rosaries is the Parc de Bagatelle near Paris, while other contemporary ones include the Badener Rosarium in Baden, Austria, the Roseto Comunale in Rome, the rosarium at the Adelaide Botanic Garden in Australia, the International Rose Test Garden in Portland, USA, and the Montreal Botanic Garden in Canada. These rosaries and many others are sponsored by the World Federation of Rose Societies, see <http://worldrose.org/index.html> [cited 2020-06-28].

13 Venkov, vol. 28, no. 214, 13. 9. 1933, p. 3. After Sangerhausen is named the red variety of rose *Mayor Čermák* (1932).

14 Originally 16 “korec” (the old areal rate; 2877,5 square meters).

15 Jan Böhm Jubilejní seznam a ceník růží (Jubilee List and Price List of Roses), Blatná 1928, p. 3.

16 Jan Böhm, Blatenské královny (Queens from Blatná), Blatná 1934, p. 72.

17 According to unclassified photograph in Archive of Museum in Blatná.

18 Státní okresní archiv Strakonice (State District Archives Strakonice, further as SOKA Strakonice), fund (further f.) Okresní národní výbor Blatná (District National Committee Blatná), inv. no. 125, Protocols for Construction.

19 Anna Štechová, Růže z Blatné — historie a současnost, pp. 35–41. Retrieved in SOKA Strakonice.

20 Jak jsem začínal, pp. 58–59.



grew roses as well as trees, annuals, and perennials.²¹ For the first two years of his business, Jan Böhms grew vegetables on part of his land, which he then sold in the surrounding villages for at least some profit.²²

Given his strong specialisation (he only started selling other flowers such as phlox, peonies, dahlias, and some berries at the turn of the 1930s), Jan Böhms needed to reach a sufficiently large customer base. If he had used the classic method of advertising in periodicals, he would have had to spend considerably more money than he initially had available. Moreover, Böhms assumed that it would be more effective to offer a story to the customer rather than an across-the-board press advertisement; he therefore took advantage of the trend towards self-magazine advertising at the time and built his promotion on it. From the very beginning of his business, he built up a reputation for always following his dreams while presenting himself as an expert who understood his work. In 1928, he published a large catalogue²³ which, alongside a range of roses with their description and characteristics or growing requirements, included Böhms's own recollections of the start of the business, and from that year onwards he always supplemented the classic price lists with an introduction by the grower, where he was sure to mention his own self-made man beginnings. At the same time, he published brochures for gardeners in which he gave advice on how to grow roses and more.²⁴ He also published professional and popular articles in the press, mostly in various gardening columns.²⁵

As mentioned above, in the early days of his business, Jan Böhms used advertising in the press rather rarely, advertising only invitations to rose shows in Blatná. Advertis-

21 "During the years 1918 to the early 1940s there were about sixty-five registered nurseries. It is not possible to establish a more accurate number, as there were smaller nurseries, less well known to the wider public, in addition to those that were registered. A number of new nurseries were established during this period, which gradually developed into firms of national importance." P. Salaš — J. Veleba — V. Truhlář — M. Horáková, *100 let česko-slovenského školkařství*, p. 14. Among the largest nurseries we can mention the Páv nursery in Lysá nad Labem, the Molitorov nursery in Kouřim, the Thomayer nursery in Prague, the Vaňek nursery in Chrudim, the František Matulík rose and fruit nursery in Horní Lhota near Luhačovice, and the Jan Mička rose and fruit nursery in Blatná.

22 Because of the growing cycle, shrub roses can be sold no earlier than the second year after the rootstock is planted. "It is only in the second year that one or two suitable straight shoots are formed. Keep both and only remove the weaker one later in the growing season. [...] The individual shoots are lightly tied to a horizontally tensioned wire and grafted in summer." The seedlings are ploughed up and kept covered for the winter in preservatives. "In spring, we leave only the rootstock above the grafting site." Bushes grown in this way can be sold in autumn. According to Jaroslav Havlů — Franišek Klimeš — Bohumil Jaša, *Růže, královna květin (The Rose, Queen of Flowers)*, Praha 1977, p. 249.

23 Jan Böhms, *Jubilejní seznam a ceník růží*, Blatná 1928.

24 E.g. Jan Böhms, *Stručné a praktické rady pro milovníky — pěstitele růže (Brief and Practical Advices for Rose Lovers — Growers)*, Blatná 1931; Jan Böhms, *Mičurinovo tajemství o plodech severu (Michurin's Secrets about the Fruits of the North)*, Blatná 1940.

25 For example Jan Böhms, *V čem se chybuje při vysazování růže (What Goes Wrong when Planting Roses)*, *Večer. Lidový deník*, vol. 20, 1933, no. 47, 24. 2. 1933, p. 3.



ing became more prominent in the early 1930s and can be divided into two types. The first type refers to the fact that these roses are known worldwide (“Böhm’s roses have won over the whole world”;²⁶ “Böhm’s world-famous roses...”²⁷). The second type is an advertisement for the plants of the Russian grower Ivan Vladimirovich Michurin,²⁸ which were widely promoted by Böhm. The common feature of both types of advertisement is that they are very simple, graphically unelaborate advertisements based on text, sometimes supplemented by a simple picture. The rose advertisements were typically included in the advertising section among short advertisements. These were characterised by a bold headline and a few words drawing attention to the start of the sale of shrubs or free price lists.²⁹ Böhm did not begin to deal with Michurin’s cuttings until the second half of the 1930s, which also corresponds to the advertisement in the newspaper. Some of the advertising was in the form of advertisements, some already in a frame, most often at the top of the newspaper page, and was accompanied by a simple drawing of a girl with a flower or a graphic likeness, probably of I. V. Michurin. The text was almost always followed by a headline that drew attention to the quality of the cultivation, such as “In thirteen years and two Siberian winters...” or “The command of the times: I. V. Michurin: Grow the fastest, biggest, and best fruit everywhere!”³⁰

According to his memoirs, Jan Böhm initially did not have the financial resources to advertise widely in the press, so he took the route of specialist articles in gardening and hobby magazines.³¹ Already during his study tours in Europe he contributed to the local trade press³² and thus built up a reputation as an expert. His reasoning was that if he made himself known to his potential customers as someone who understood roses and could advise others on how to grow a healthy and flowering rose, people would be interested in buying roses from him. Finally, he used essentially unpaid advertising, as his business bore his name. It cannot be said that he did not use press advertising at all, but he was very economical with it, and it was always precisely targeted. During the main season, i.e. spring and autumn, he offered the plants for purchase; in the summer he printed advertisements for the Blatná Rose Show, and during November and December he offered the noble buds to other growers to propagate roses.³³ The advertisement itself was graphically rather simple and

26 E.g. Venkov, vol. 27, 1932, no. 239, 9. 10. 1932, p. 16.

27 E.g. Venkov, vol. 28, 1933, no. 67, 19. 3. 1933, p. 13.

28 Ivan Vladimirovich Michurin (1855–1935) was a Russian practitioner of selection to produce new types of crop plants, Honorable Member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and academician of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agriculture. Throughout all his life, Michurin worked to create new sorts of fruit plants. He introduced over 300 new varieties. He was awarded the Order of Lenin and Order of the Red Banner of Labour for his achievements. Ivan Vladimirovich Michurin [online]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Vladimirovich_Michurin [cited 2022-08-05].

29 “A surprise for all gardeners — this year’s cheap prices of Böhm’s world-famous roses, flowers, and trees...” see e.g. Lidové noviny, vol. 42, 1934, no. 470, 18. 9. 1934, p. 4.

30 E.g. Venkov, vol. 34, 1939, no. 224, 24. 9. 1939, p. 11.

31 Jak jsem začínal, p. 64.

32 Ibid.

33 See e.g. Pražská zahradní bursa. Ústřední odborný a obchodní časopis zahradnický pro



Advertisement in Blatenské listy (Blatenské listy, vol. III, 1933, no. 22 (65), 4. 11. 1933, p. 9)



schematic — at first just the inscription “Böhm — Růže — Blatná” in a frame, later with the addition of a silhouette of a lady with roses or simply roses.

Böhm’s advertisement had its firm place in the local fortnightly independent periodical “Blatenské listy” (Blatná Newspaper), published directly in Blatná. Böhm was a frequent contributor to this periodical and a frequent subject of news. It is clear from the “Blatenské listy” that Jan Böhm was a well-known and respected personality, and that the people of Blatná were aware of the benefits of the popularity of the rose plantations for local tourism. At the same time, Böhm was given space not only for advertising (which was again very simple), but also for criticism of, for example, the state of accommodation or hospitality. At the time of the rose exhibitions, the “Blatenské listy” was published with a special exhibition supplement, and between 1935 and 1937 each issue contained a supplement edited by Jan Böhm: “Růžový záhon čsl. zahrádkáře” (The Rose Bed of the Czechoslovak Gardener). The supplement was usually up to ten pages long, with the grower printing advice on growing roses, news from exhibitions, and letters of thanks from his customers. On other pages Böhm also dealt, for example, with the history of rose breeding in various countries and news from around the world concerning rose growing. Once in a while, a crossword puzzle

Republiku Československou, (Prague Garden Exchange. Central professional and trade horticultural magazine for the Czechoslovak Republic), 1927–1940.



or a short story with roses as the theme also appeared at the end of the supplement.

Böhm's participation in exhibitions and the subsequent references in the press to his successes were important advertisements. From 1922, his second year of sales, he participated in at least two domestic exhibitions each year from which he took home prizes and awards. Whether these were landscape, trade, agricultural, or horticultural exhibitions, every visitor became a potential customer of Böhm's company. The winners of such exhibition prizes were then reported (at least) in the local press, thus again spreading awareness of the rose plantations near the South Bohemian town. When in 1924 Jan Böhm started the tradition of summer rose exhibitions directly in Blatná, the press started to use it more. Above all, however, he took the route of the "protectorate", i.e. the sponsorship of the exhibition by various organisations (e.g. the Czech Tourist Club, the National Rifle Unit, the Agrarian Party, the Catholic Youth, etc.). These events significantly influenced tourism in Blatná, and at this time the town of Blatná and Jan Böhm actively cooperated in the smooth running of the exhibition, whether by providing hospitality, accommodation, or transport (increasing the number of trains). In addition, special excursion trains were dispatched to Blatná under the auspices of the Czech Tourist Club, and coach tours were organised by travel agencies.³⁴ After Böhm began to participate in foreign exhibitions in the early 1930s, both the "Blatenské listy" and the "Pražská zahradní burza" (Prague Garden Exchange) frequently reported on his achievements. The roses bred by Böhm were awarded medals, honorary prizes, and certificates of ability in Bagatelle in Paris, Rome, Saverne, and Barcelona. Jan Böhm was the first foreigner to receive a certificate from The National Rose Society in Westminster³⁵ for his rose *Sláva Böhmová* (Slava Böhm, 1930). Jan Böhm himself became a member of the jury, i.e. a judge of roses in the Rosarium in Bagatelle.

Although Jan Böhm was completely aloof from political events in his community and demonstrated his apolitical nature by the very diverse patronage of his rose exhibitions, it cannot be said that he did not take part in social life. On the contrary, the extent of his sponsorship activities suggests that he had a wide network of social contacts that helped to promote his enterprise. In view of the specific nature of the goods he offered, he chose different forms of promotion which, unlike press advertising, were permanent. If press advertising has only a short-lived, ephemeral effect on the customer, roses growing around a monument or in another public space become a "living" and permanent advertisement for the supplier, who has indeed lived up to his promises of a high-quality product. In this way, Böhm created a form of communication between himself and his (potential) customer that contributed to building the company's reputation and at the same time presented him as a successful self-made man who had not forgotten his troubled beginnings. Jan Böhm was involved in building memorials (planting rose bushes around the Jan Hus monument in

34 E.g. article *Zveme Vás do říše růží* (You Are Welcome to Rose Empire), *Blatenské listy*, vol. II, 1932, no. 14 (31), 16. 7. 1932, p. 1.

35 According to commemorative certificates and medals stored in the Archives of the Blatná Municipal Museum, no. 30–41/90.



Strakonice),³⁶ planting school gardens (e.g. the school in Nový Klíčov near Domažlice in 1934), and planting public spaces (in 1932 donating 1 400 roses to the Prague city gardens, in 1936 3 000 rose bushes to Dr. A. Švehla (1935) on Petřín,³⁷ in 1938 plantings on the crossroads by the Sokol Hall and the statue of St. Wenceslas in Blatná).³⁸ In 1925, the proceeds from an exhibition of roses on the Blatná plantations were donated to the completion of the new Blatná Sokol Hall.³⁹ In June 1934, the 2nd year of the burgher girls' school went on a school trip to Prague. Part of this trip was a visit to the Old Town Hall where, in the presence of Prague Mayor Karel Baxa, the pupils laid "a beautiful wreath of roses on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The wreath had 3 wide ribbons with the following inscriptions: on the white ribbon: 'Freedom Fighter', — on the blue ribbon: 'Second year of the girls' school', — on the red ribbon: 'From Blatná — the city of roses'". The wreath donated by the Böhmm Růže Blatná company was presented by the grower's eldest daughter Marie (Máňa).⁴⁰ Although the girls' expedition was primarily intended to promote the town of Blatná, it is clear that Jan Böhmm benefited the most from it, as he took the opportunity for his daughters to meet the Mayor of Prague.

Still, through his sponsorship activities, the choice of organisations sponsoring his exhibitions, and above all the way he named his roses, he clearly defined himself as a distinctly Czech national and state-forming enterprise.

The typology of names of roses bred by Böhmm can be divided into three categories, two of which are partly intertwined. The leading category — and the first rose names — was family. Each of the grower's children (*Máňa Böhmmová*, 1925, *Lidka Böhmmová*, 1929, *Anči Böhmmová*, 1929, *Sláva Böhmmová*, 1930, *Böhmm Junior*, 1935), his wife (*Grower's Wife*, 1932), his brother (*Luba's Ideal*, 1933) and his parents (*Jan Böhmm*, 1928, *Böhmm Senior*, 1935, *Golden Jubilee*, 1938, for his parents' golden wedding) had their own rose. Another large category was "personified" roses, named after many different important personalities. There were personalities from Czech history, popular contemporaries, Czechoslovak and foreign politicians, and literary figures. An important category was roses that directly expressed the grower's respect for the Republic. However, these categories are not entirely definitive, as roses could be named after virtually anything. Examples include *Ave Maria (Böhmm)* (1933), *Stratosphere* (1933), and *Aureola* (1934).⁴¹

Through the names of roses, Jan Böhmm declared his opinion and his beliefs and showed who he was. But at the same time — and above all — he aroused emotions.

36 Commemorative certificate of thanks in the Archives of the Blatná Municipal Museum (no. 33/90), undated, the monument was created in the years 1925–1926.

37 Venkov, vol. 31, 1936, no. 116, 17. 5. 1936, p. 3.

38 Based on letters of thanks and commemorative certificates archived at the Archives of the Blatná Municipal Museum, no. 30–41/90.

39 E.g. Venkov, vol. 20, 1925, no. 156, 5. 6. 1925, p. 7.

40 Blatenské listy, vol. IV, 1934, no. 13 (82), 30. 6. 1934, pp. 1–2.

41 Names of roses according to catalogues of Böhmm — Růže — Blatná and catalogue of varieties of Roses in the Czech Republic [online]. Available from: <http://ruze.wi.cz/index.php?i=ABB00B%F6hm> [cited 2020-06-20].



The roses named in this way showed customers their love for their family, respect for their ancestors, and identification with important personalities of Czech history. Everyone could read in the rose catalogue a clear support for the new Czechoslovak state and its president. In the same way as the language of flowers had been widespread for a hundred years, Jan Böhm used the symbolism of the rose to let it speak to his customers. When he added the Czech name to the symbolism of the queen of flowers, along with an infinite variety of colours and their meanings, the rose itself became an expression of an opinion or an entire story. The rose could therefore speak to the customer on its own, the buyer could choose whether he preferred the then Czechoslovak president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (*T.G.M.*), long-time Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Eduard Beneš (*Eduard Beneš*), or one of the prominent figures of the Czechoslovak resistance during the First World War Milan Rastislav Štefánik (*General Štefánik*). Out of respect for tradition, he could choose important figures of Czech National Revival such as writer Božena Němcová (1931), historian and politician Palacký (1936), or politician František Ladislav Rieger (1939), or world-famous composers such as Bedřich Smetana (1932) or Antonín Dvořák (1933). By buying these roses, one joined a certain current of opinion, the link between which was respect for the young Czechoslovak Republic and its history.

Abroad, the trend of naming newly bred flowers (not only roses) after important personalities or the worldview of the breeder was nothing new. However, it was new in Czechoslovakia. By naming his roses after Czechs, Jan Böhm not only expressed his own patriotism, but also joined the institution of the national enterprise and began to create a tradition and a field that gained a firm place in the national Czechoslovak economy. We can say that over 80% of the roses bred by Böhm had a name that in some way expressed the grower's nationalism.

The names of the newly bred roses had not only a declarative but also a promotional purpose. Letters of thanks from the cities of Prague and Plzeň, from the Office of the President of the Republic and from the French Foreign Ministry for the dedication of the roses *Zlatá Praha* (1931), *Plzeň* (1930), *Masaryk's Jubilee* (1931), and *Briand-Paneuropa* (1930) are preserved from 1930, when Böhm began to devote himself fully to rose breeding.⁴² The purple rose *General Štefánik* (1931),⁴³ was also highly publicized, and the Štefánik monument was richly decorated with it. When the famous Czech entrepreneur and shoemaker Tomáš Baťa Sr. died tragically in 1932, Jan Böhm named the rose in his honour — *Tomáš Baťa* (1932).⁴⁴ The *Esperanto* rose (1932) was reported in the “*Blatenské listy*” as having been sent to the Esperantist Society, which presented a bouquet of these yellow roses to its oldest member.⁴⁵ After the assassina-

42 Letters of thanks deposited in the archives of the Blatná Municipal Museum, ref. no. 14/2009.

43 E.g. Jeden ze světových divů: blatenská modrá růže „Generál Štefánik“ (One of the wonders of the world: the Blatná blue rose “General Štefánik”), *Blatenské listy*, vol. I, 1931, no. 5, 11. 7. 1931, p. 1.

44 *Blatenské listy*, vol. II, 1932, no. 15 (32), 31. 7. 1932, Exhibition supplement to *Blatenské listy*, p. 5.

45 90letá babička esperanta dostala kyticí českých růží (90-year-old Esperanto grand-



tion of Chicago's Czech-born mayor Antonín Čermák, a rose named after him, *Mayor Čermák* (1932), was planted around the garden pavilion at the Century of Progress exhibition by his granddaughter and was reported in the American provincial press.⁴⁶ In 1934, when the film *On Roses* (see below) was filmed in Blatná, Jan Böhm named the new light pink rose after the actress *Lída Baarová* (1934). "The Soviet government has asked the exhibitor of Czechoslovak roses in Moscow, the Blatná grower Böhm, to allow the new roses sent for the exhibition and bearing the names of Michurin (1936) and L. N. Tolstoy (1938)⁴⁷ to be planted one bush each on the graves of Michurin and Tolstoy."⁴⁸ For the funeral of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, T. G. Masaryk, the grower donated several thousand flowers of *Masaryk's Jubilee* and *T. G. M. roses*.⁴⁹ When in 1938 he put the rose *Czechoslovak Defence* on sale, he declared that he would donate the proceeds from the sale of this rose to the defence of the state.⁵⁰ In the same year he bred the *Olivet Rose*, which was to be planted on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. And in 1946, he launched the *Peace* rose, dedicated to the victims of war. Jan Böhm did not shy away from "customer competitions" either: two roses bear the name chosen by visitors to the rose exhibitions in Blatná, namely *Antonín Dvořák* (1931) and *Bedřich Smetana* (1932).

As far as active communication with customers through competitions was concerned, occasional competitions, not only knowledge-based or guessing competitions (most often on the occasion of exhibitions), appeared in his yearbooks, catalogues, in the "Blatenské Listy", whose supplement he edited between 1935 and 1937, and in other periodicals. On 29 January 1935, the magazine "Křížovka a důvtip" (Crossword and wit) even published an advertising crossword (based mainly on a knowledge of Czech rose varieties) for 20 rose bushes supplied by the grower Böhm.⁵¹ For the 15th anniversary of the company, the price list promised a free rose (or other flower from Böhm's plant) with every order.⁵²

In his catalogues, Jan Böhm also printed poems written for his plant or for individual roses. A certain Alois Navrátil from Senice na Hané has his poem in the 1932/1933 yearbook. He ended it with the verse "The rose is famous/ Queen of all flowers/ Böhm, the 'king of roses' / is known today by every Czech!!!"⁵³ The poem "The Rose Tale",

mother receives a bouquet of Czech roses), *Blatenské listy*, vol. II, 1932, no. 17 (34), 27. 8. 1932, p. 3.

46 Čermákova růže na výstavě Století pokroku (Čermák's rose on the Century of Progress Exhibition), *Nedělní Svornost* (Sunday Svornost), part two, vol. 58, 1933, no. 33, 28. 5. 1933, p. 1.

47 In all databases of rose varieties, the "Tolstoj" (Tolstoi) is dated to 1938. It is possible that it was officially recognised in that year, but Böhm had sold and exhibited it earlier.

48 *Lidové noviny*, vol. 44, no. 219, 30. 4. 1936, p. 7.

49 Jan Böhm, *Dvacet let československých růží* (Twenty years of Czechoslovakia roses), Blatná 1938, pp. 184–185.

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Křížovka a důvtip*, vol. X, 1929, no. 5, 29. 1. 1929, p. 6.

52 Jan Böhm, *Blatenské královny* (Queens of Blatná), Blatná 1934.

53 Jan Böhm, *Ročenka a ceník Böhmových růžařských podniků v Blatné městě růží*, Č. S. R. Podzim 1932 — jaro 1933 (Yearbook and price list of Böhm's rose-growing enter-



Blatná as the “city of roses” (undated postcard)

printed in the 1938 catalogue, also ends with a tribute to the grower: “The rose dream has become true.../ Hail Jan Böhm, the rose king!/ He always longs to celebrate his homeland,/ he only longs for hard work...”⁵⁴ The poem was sent to Blatná by F. F. Hájek. Vilém David⁵⁵ also dedicated his poems to the roses of Blatná, who sent Jan Böhm a set of several dozen poems, each dedicated to a particular variety of roses bred by Böhm. These poems have not been printed in any of the catalogues,⁵⁶ but there is a poem by the same author dedicated to the grower in the introduction to the publication “Blatenské královny”. Also printed in the appendix of the “Blatenský listy” was “Czech Rose (Blatná rose), a song for piano with voice”, sent to the grower by Rudolf Hanf.⁵⁷ The poems were published not only in prints coming directly from Jan Böhm. For example, a poem by Alois K. Hevera⁵⁸ entitled “Rose” was published in the “Blatenské

prises in Blatná, City of Roses, Č. S. R. Autumn 1932–Spring 1933), Blatná 1932, p. 10. Three exclamation marks in the original.

⁵⁴ J. Böhm, Dvacet let československých růží, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Vilém David (1867–1938), poet, short story writer and journalist. He devoted himself to so-called proletarian poetry.

⁵⁶ They are preserved in manuscript form in the archives of the Blatná Municipal Museum.

⁵⁷ Rudolf Hanf (1867–1939), Czech singer-songwriter. Růžový záhon československého zahradníka (Rose Bed of the Czechoslovak Gardener), supplement to Blatenské Listy, no. 5, May 1935, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Born Adolf Karel Hevera (1878–1939), teacher, author of novels for youth.



listy”.⁵⁹ This poem described how the rose accompanies a person throughout his life, from birth and after death, until finally, unlike humans, it survives. Böhm did not shy away from small jokes about himself. In the column entitled “Anecdotes about the King of Roses” of the exhibition supplement of the “Blatenské listy”, the following story was printed: “When the boss gets tips. All Böhm’s co-workers are ordered not to disturb him when the boss is working on the plantation, no matter who comes. Sometimes it happens that Böhm the grower is forced to show visitors around without introducing himself. After one such escort, a larger lady suggested to her husband that he should give the ‘young man’ a five-crown tip, and before Mr. Böhm could defend himself, the master thrust the five-crown into his hand, but to his great surprise he heard: ‘Excuse me, I do not accept tips, I am the owner of the business.’”⁶⁰ The poems composed by professional poets and many customers of the Blatná business show that Böhm’s roses were becoming a phenomenon, no longer just an “ordinary” commodity. People bought the roses and then stayed in contact with the grower. This is evidenced by the many thank-you letters printed in rose catalogues or in the aforementioned “Blatenské listy” supplement “Růžový záhon” (Rose Bed). “Anecdotes” or other stories from the company also showed Jan Böhm from the “human side” as an “ordinary man” and added to the image he had built up. The emphasis on his modesty and hard work were the main features of his self-presentation.

The peak of this self-presentation campaign came in 1933. At that time, Böhm took a very specific path, although it is difficult to say for sure whether he was the initiator or merely took advantage of the opportunity. In 1933, Karel Piskoř and František Kožík (under the pseudonym Jiří Žalman) wrote a play called “Na růžích ustláno” (On a Bed of Roses).⁶¹ It was a romantic operetta in three acts, first performed in the 1933/1934 season by the Brno Municipal Theatre⁶² and then by several other theatres in Bohemia and Moravia, such as the Plzeň Theatre and the Grand Operetta in Prague. The script was written for a large stage and three ensembles: ballet, singers, and actors. The plot is quite simple, with a love plot and a deeper moral message, and takes place partly at a rose show and partly in a rose farm. Jan Böhm attended every premiere where he gave a ceremonial speech, and Böhm’s roses were distributed to the audience during the intervals. In Plzeň, each ticket was entered into a draw for rose bushes and other prizes.⁶³

In 1935, the film Barrandov studios followed up the huge success of the operetta. Jan Böhm also collaborated on the film of the same name, mainly by providing expert advice and by lending his farm for the exterior shots.⁶⁴ Although the name of

59 Blatenské listy, vol. III, 1933, no. 16 (59), 12. 8. 1933, p. 1.

60 Blatenské listy, vol. II, 1932, no. 15 (32), 31. 7. 1932, p. 2.

61 Bohumír Polách, Jiří Žalman, Na růžích ustláno. Opereta o 3 jednáních (On the Bed of Roses. Operetta of Three Acts), Praha 1935.

62 Romana Pavlíčková, Oldřich Nový a brněnská meziválečná operetta (Oldřich Nový and Operetta in Brno between Two World Wars), bachelor thesis, Masaryk University in Brno, Faculty of Arts, Brno 2013, pp. 32–36.

63 Český směr, vol. 36, 1934, no. 37, 8. 4. 1934, p. 9.

64 Filmová tisková korespondence, vol. 1, 1934, no. 141, 14. 11. 1934, p. 1.



the important Czechoslovak grower does not appear in the film itself, it can still be described as his important advertising achievement. Most of the performances were sponsored by Böhm or otherwise associated with him, for example through the supply of roses or prizes for audience competitions. At the same time, his name appeared on advertisements for individual performances.

It is also interesting to note that both the play and the film (which is slightly simplified compared to the operetta) have strong “Böhm-ish” biographical elements. Apart from the fact that one of the main characters, whose dream is to become a rose breeder and grower, does indeed eventually set up a prosperous business, the film contains many of the ideas promoted by Böhm. It should be remembered that it is the ideas about the usefulness of honest manual labour, which ennobles the spirit and helps the body, and the humility of the rich and successful towards those who were not so lucky, that are based on the contemporary trend and admiration for the self-made men.

But the film “Na růžích ustláno” (On a bed of roses) is significant in another respect. As mentioned above, although Jan Böhm’s name is not mentioned in the entire film, nor is his business, this film can be considered a kind of advertising film. What is more significant than the visibility of the company’s name is the fact that the film influences the viewer’s perception of the rose as a consumer product. If we focus only on specific examples, a fundamental trend can be observed, namely the attempt to convince the viewer that the rose, not only as a flower but also as a shrub, is a normal part of life. Girls meet boys at rose shows, there is always a vase of roses on the table at home, and a man’s dream job is rose breeding. Coincidentally, this man’s name is Jiří (George) with the English surname Garden. The moment the viewer gets the impression that planting and caring for roses, or gifting his loved ones with rose blossoms, is quite common, he himself will look for someone to sell him these roses. At the time of the film’s release, Jan Böhm was already known not only as a Czech businessman, but also as a successful rose breeder whose roses had won awards at exhibitions all over Europe and which were sold in America and Asia. The entrepreneur thus did not need to make his name known. In times of economic crisis, potential customers needed to be convinced that they needed these “surplus goods”. And a feature film featuring contemporary stars of the Czech cinema screen, led by Lída Baarová, is a good tool for this. Although the critics did not receive the film entirely positively, mostly describing it as a “shallow operetta”, the audience received it with enthusiasm.⁶⁵ And given that Böhm’s business grew until the beginning of the Second World War, it is clear that customers found his plantation located in the small South Bohemian town.

A cursory glance at Jan Böhm’s promotional strategies shows that he was a well-known First Czechoslovak Republic gardener who ranked alongside the best-known contemporary entrepreneurs in his field. With his nickname of “Baťa in Roses”, he symbolized everything that Bata was to the shoe industry. Although there were a large number of horticultural enterprises in interwar Czechoslovakia that had a higher

⁶⁵ Bibliography e.g. Eva Urbanová — Blažena Ugrošíková — Vladimír Opěla — Karolina Vočadlová, *Český hraný film: Czech Feature Film 2, 1930–1945*, Praha 1998, p. 213.

turnover or offered a wider range of plants and skilled rose breeders or growers, none of them achieved such fame as Jan Böhm. The key to his success must be found in the way the company and its goods were promoted. Böhm focused on specific forms of advertising that were less costly but more permanent in relation to the commodity traded. The grower himself built up a reputation as a horticultural expert who had built up his business himself, a man who was not indifferent to his surroundings or to social events, through specialist publications or articles, his own memories and sponsorship. He used newly bred rose varieties to place himself in the national mainstream, along with presenting the Czechoslovak Republic abroad. He was very creative in his promotion, he was able to take advantage of the current situation in his surroundings (he donated a number of rose bushes to plant Blatná⁶⁶ and Prague orchards), the deaths of important personalities (Štefánik, Baťa, Masaryk, etc.) or events in the world (the World Exhibition in Chicago, the Esperantist Congress). It was Böhm's patriotism and his ability to give roses a story that earned him a place in the gallery of successful entrepreneurs of the First Czechoslovak Republic.



⁶⁶ It was 700 plants for planting a repaired street Fügnerova, that led towards the Böhm's enterprises. *Blatenské listy*, vol. VII, 1937, no. 10, 22. 5. 1937, p. 3.