

# **Christian Josef Willenberg, the Founder of the Oldest Engineering School in the Kingdom of Bohemia and Moravia and in Central Europe**

(April 4, 1676 – November 21, 1731)

## **Christian Josef Willenberg's Contribution**

Christian Josef Willenberg was a military civil (fortification) engineer. He acquired specialist knowledge during his serving in the French army. After having taken examinations in arithmetic, geometry, trigonometry and irregular territorial fortification, the Imperial Court Council awarded him the Imperial Engineer title in 1706.

Christian Willenberg was born at Legnica in Silesia, he died in Prague in 1731. His name has been linked to the origin of technical engineering education in our country, namely the Czech Technical University in Prague.

On January 30 in 1705, Mr. Willenberg had written a letter (script) having asked the Emperor of Austria and King of Bohemia, Leopold I to give lectures to "six persons of noble blood, four persons of the title of Knight and two persons of middle-class family in the art of engineering". He received his answer from Leopold's son, Joseph I, after his ascension to the throne. In his reply, dated January 18, 1707, he recommended the Estates of Bohemia and Moravia grant Willenberg's request. Today's Czech Technical University in Prague considers this rescript as its Foundation Agreement. However, the Estates of Bohemia and Moravia responded to this after the Emperor of Austria and King of Bohemia, Charles VI had intervened. The Decree on Establishment of Professorship and Christian Willenberg's nomination for the Bohemian Polytechnic Institute of the Estates professor was issued on November 9 in 1717. The first lectures started on January 7, 1718. Even if the study is free of charge for Estates students, only nine students had been enrolled. None of students was interested in paid lectures. Necessary books had been bought, some of the old volumes are still extant and have been kept in the State Technical Library archive. He was obliged to hold lectures in his own home – he used to live in Mostecká street in Prague Lesser Town. On the decree on books, Mr. Willenberg was obliged to stock books and give lectures in his home in Mostecká Street in Lesser Town. Later, he moved to a Prague Old Town house on the corner of Lilly and St. Anna's streets where his students lived. Other disciplines were gradually added to fortification construction, e.g. geodesy, cartography, drainage works, construction of heavy load lifting mechanisms etc. This way laid the foundations for organized education of so called engineering disciplines in our country.

In 1786, the Klementinum engineering school was relocated to the building of former St. Wenceslaus' seminary in Dominikánská street (renamed Husova street in 1870).

One year later, in 1787, the Emperor Joseph II Decree ordered a merger of Estates' Engineering School with Prague University. The education had been focused on preparation of civil engineers without military science.

