

2.27 *Vojtěch Náprstek, František Josef Studnička
and the American Ladies Club in Prague*

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In 1860, the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph issued the *October Diploma (Oktoberdiplom)*, the first step to the constitutional monarchy which allowed also the establishment of citizen voluntary associations. The first such associations were considered only for men, women were admitted in general later, by about 1900. The establishment of the *American Ladies Club* in 1865 in Prague, an association focused on education of women, was undoubtedly a revolutionary achievement.

The founder Vojtěch Náprstek (ethnographer, 1826–1894) lived in the USA for 10 years, and after return he began to organize Czech intellectual life in his mother's house U Halánků (today Náprstek Museum).

His friend František Josef Studnička (1836–1903) held the first lecture with an extraordinary success and the same evening the association was founded and called “American”, which was then the synonym for “modern”. Studnička, professor of mathematics and natural sciences at the Prague University, wrote several dozen textbooks and popular scientific books, for *American Ladies Club* he delivered altogether 27 lectures, of which 16 were about astronomy. To make the lectures more attractive and illustrative, diagrams produced by *Working Men's Educational Union* were bought at the 1862 *International Exhibition* in London. Recently it happened to find these diagrams printed on canvas in Náprstek Museum in Prague and so we can document better the atmosphere of public lectures in times prior to slide projection.