

## This Day in History... March 7, 1850

### Birth of Thomas Masaryk

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was born on March 7, 1850, in Hodonín, Austrian Empire (present-day Czech Republic).

Masaryk was born into a poor, working-class family, but was able to attend grammar school and eventually the University of Vienna. In 1876, he graduated with a PhD, and by 1882, he was working as a professor of philosophy at Charles University of Prague.

Masaryk entered politics in 1891 when he began a two-year term in the Imperial Council as part of the Young Czech Party. Then in 1900, he founded the Czech Realist Party, which sought to establish a free, open democracy and an independent Czecho-Slovakian republic. Masaryk was again elected to the Imperial Council as a member of the Realist Party in 1907 and remained there until 1914.

When World War I broke out that year, Masaryk promoted the idea that the Czechs and Slovaks should create their own independent country outside of Austria-Hungary to the Allies. He and his daughter left the country and traveled to Rome, Geneva, Paris, London, Russia, Tokyo, and the US. In each of these places, Masaryk gave speeches, wrote articles, and established contacts for the independence movement. During his time in Russia, Masaryk helped form the Czechoslovak Legion to fight for the Allies. Masaryk also created an intelligence network that spied on German and Austrian diplomats, providing valuable intelligence to the Allies.

*From the Champions of Liberty Series*



*Issued on Masaryk's 110th birthday.*

In 1918, Masaryk reached the United States and gained support for his cause from President Woodrow Wilson. On October 26, 1918, he delivered a speech on the steps of Independence Hall in Philadelphia as head of the Mid-European Union. In the speech, he called for the independence of the Czechoslovaks and all other oppressed people in Central Europe.



*A historical marker was placed at Independence Hall where Masaryk delivered his speech.*



*Masaryk lectured at the University of Chicago in 1902 and 1907 and received a warm welcome in 1918. A monument was later built there in his honor.*

After the Austria-Hungary Empire was dissolved following World War I, Masaryk was named the head of the provisional government. He was elected the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic in November 1918. Masaryk would be re-elected three times, in 1920, 1927, and 1934. As president, Masaryk didn't have a great deal of power, as the creators of the constitution had given much of it to the prime minister and the cabinet. However, Masaryk served as a symbol of stability for the young republic, as during his tenure there would be 10 cabinets headed by nine prime ministers. It was also during his time as president that Czechoslovakia became the strongest democracy in Central Europe.

Masaryk resigned from the presidency in December 1935 due to his age and poor health. He died less than two years later on September 14, 1937. To many people in Czechoslovakia, he served as a symbol of democracy and has been called The Great Old Man of Europe.



*Masaryk was the first president of Czechoslovakia and is considered its founding father.*

# This Day in History... March 7, 1850

## Birth of Thomas Masaryk

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was born on March 7, 1850, in Hodonín, Austrian Empire (present-day Czech Republic).

Masaryk was born into a poor, working-class family, but was able to attend grammar school and eventually the University of Vienna. In 1876, he graduated with a PhD, and by 1882, he was working as a professor of philosophy at Charles University of Prague.

Masaryk entered politics in 1891 when he began a two-year term in the Imperial Council as part of the Young Czech Party. Then in 1900, he founded the Czech Realist Party, which sought to establish a free, open democracy and an independent Czecho-Slovakian republic. Masaryk was again elected to the Imperial Council as a member of the Realist Party in 1907 and remained there until 1914.

When World War I broke out that year, Masaryk promoted the idea that the Czechs and Slovaks should create their own independent country outside of Austria-Hungary to the Allies. He and his daughter left the country and traveled to Rome, Geneva, Paris, London, Russia, Tokyo, and the US. In each of these places, Masaryk gave speeches, wrote articles, and established contacts for the independence movement. During his time in Russia, Masaryk helped form the Czechoslovak Legion to fight for the Allies. Masaryk also created an intelligence network that spied on German and Austrian diplomats, providing valuable intelligence to the Allies.

*From the Champions of Liberty Series*



*Issued on Masaryk's 110th birthday.*

In 1918, Masaryk reached the United States and gained support for his cause from President Woodrow Wilson. On October 26, 1918, he delivered a speech on the steps of Independence Hall in Philadelphia as head of the Mid-European Union. In the speech, he called for the independence of the Czechoslovaks and all other oppressed people in Central Europe.



*A historical marker was placed at Independence Hall where Masaryk delivered his speech.*



*Masaryk lectured at the University of Chicago in 1902 and 1907 and received a warm welcome in 1918. A monument was later built there in his honor.*

After the Austria-Hungary Empire was dissolved following World War I, Masaryk was named the head of the provisional government. He was elected the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic in November 1918. Masaryk would be re-elected three times, in 1920, 1927, and 1934. As president, Masaryk didn't have a great deal of power, as the creators of the constitution had given much of it to the prime minister and the cabinet. However, Masaryk served as a symbol of stability for the young republic, as during his tenure there would be 10 cabinets headed by nine prime ministers. It was also during his time as president that Czechoslovakia became the strongest democracy in Central Europe.

Masaryk resigned from the presidency in December 1935 due to his age and poor health. He died less than two years later on September 14, 1937. To many people in Czechoslovakia, he served as a symbol of democracy and has been called The Great Old Man of Europe.



*Masaryk was the first president of Czechoslovakia and is considered its founding father.*