IN PRAISE OF CULTURAL OUTPOSTS

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The Fulbright Educational Exchange Program, being from the start known by the name of William J. Fulbright, the Senator from Arkansas who initiated the legislation, was established by the US Congress on August 1, 1946. It was motivated by the desire to "change the US's traditional isolationist policy". Since its inception, this has been one of the most prestigious academic awards. The program is managed by binational commissions and a board of ten prominent intellectuals with an equal number from the US and the partner country. The first steps towards setting up a Hungarian chapter were taken by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. The occasion was his mission to return the Holy Crown to Hungary in January 1978, a diplomatic gesture in the increasingly relaxed climate of the Kádár years. Due to the establishment's natural aversion to autonomous boards, the gestation period was long indeed and the Hungarian Fulbright Commission, headed by Huba Brückner, was only formed in 1992. Soon afterward, in 1994, the Hungarian Government awarded Senator Fulbright the Silver Cross of the Hungarian Republic.

True to its founder's aims and noble ethos, the Fulbright grant is awarded to people who devote themselves to fostering ties between different cultures: every year hundreds of researchers, lecturers, professors and students come to the US from all over the world, a substantial number of Americans go abroad to further the Fulbright objectives. (Check out the Hungarian Fulbright Commission's website: www.fulbright.hu)

In 1999, thanks to the generosity of the Fulbright Commission, I was able to pursue a dual research project, studying informatics and American studies at UCLA. Within the framework of this fellowship, I was also able to spend four months doing survey and salvage work at the American Hungarian Foundation, based in the center of Hungarian minority life in America, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Interest in Hungary is at a low ebb in the USA these days; at least this was the impression I got during my stay at the University of California, Los Angeles. Gone are the heady days when—exactly ten years ago—the rapid pace of events in Hungary leading toward the demolition of the communist system was a daily feature in the media in the United States. Visitors from Hungary—I was a Soros grantee myself at the University of Pittsburgh at the time—were received with heightened expectations and curiosity everywhere. (Prior to the *annus mirabillis* of 1989, we have to go back no fewer than three decades to experience a similar situation: the 1956 Revolution and its aftermath when thousands of refugees captured the sympathy and attention of the American public. Or, casting a glance back yet another century, we fondly remember the "Kossuth craze", when the exiled statesman's American journey in 1851/52 produced nationwide enthusiasm.)

In the spring semester of 1999, among some forty thousand students enrolled at UCLA, no more than seven signed up for a Hungarian class. True, indirect interest in the form of general historical, literary, cultural, and art studies may modify the picture a bit. Moreover, this decline of interest, to be fair, is not restricted to Hungarian culture: other Central European cultures and even French and German studies are negatively affected as well.

My research at UCLA primarily concerned library automation and web-based library services. As the systems librarian of the Academy Library Budapest, and also as library supervisor at the Collegium Budapest, I was hosted by the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. (See the School's website: www.gseis.ucla.edu). My academic adviser was Professor and Presidential Chair Christine Borgman. Following joint research carried out during her own Budapest-based Fulbright scholarship earlier in the decade, she invited me to take a deep dip into her School's PhD program, outstanding even by American standards. To give the School an overview of library developments in Hungary, I gave a lecture titled "Idiosyncrasies On and Off(line) and the Torments of Transformation: Academy Library Budapest". In line with my interest in American studies, I could pursue as a secondary theme a number of programs in the History Department, where I attended a course on the history of California conducted by a prominent historian of the Frontier, Professor Stephen Aron. I also gave a lecture at the History Department, titled "The Socio-Cultural Context of Entering the Communications Age in Central Europe".

Having finished my studies in Los Angeles, I arrived in New Brunswick in June 1999. By contrast, this small-to-medium-sized town in the state of New Jersey looked like a Magyar beehive reminis-

cent of a sultry Saturday afternoon on Rákóczi út in Budapest and everyone seemed to talk Hungarian. And no wonder, on the first Saturday of June the town was celebrating the 24th annual Hungarian festival organized by my host institution, the American Hungarian Foundation (See the Foundation's homepage: www.ahfoundation.org).

It was a memorable day full of events on and around cordoned-off Somerset Street, historically the focal point and hub of Hungarian life. After the official opening by Yolan Varga, author of an acclaimed autobiography, *The Children of Ellis Island*, the church leaders offered invocations and benedictions, and Professor August J. Molnár, Mayor of New Brunswick James M. Cahill, and Hungarian Consul István Kovács welcomed the crowd with emotional speeches. Consul Kovács stressed the importance of the community and thanked the Hungarians there for maintaining and nursing their culture during the long decades of dictatorship in Hungary.

The program included a street presentation by the Hungarian Athletic Club's folk dance ensemble *Csürdöngölő*, a modern dance performance by the Randy James Dance Works directed by American-Hungarian choreographer Randy James, and a major concert in the courtyard of the Hungarian Heritage Center.

At this point we may well ask: who were the trailblazing Hungarians in the New World? They deserve to be recalled, at least in the form of portrait sketches. The first Hungarian on the American continent materializes out of the murky world of Viking legend. The tales of Erik the Red and his son were recited in Icelandic sagas and committed to writing by Sturleson Snorro in the chronicle *Heimskringla* early in the 13th century. In 1697, these stories were published in book form by Peringskiold. The tales were read by Samuel Laing, a Scottish historian, who translated them into English. Jenő Pivány, a scholar who lived in the US, early in the 20th century discovered in Laing's book the vague figure of Tyrker. The story goes that Leif, the son of Erik the Red of Greenland, was accompanied by Tyrker, a Hungarian, on his trip to the lands overseas around the year A.D. 1,000. Tyrker remains a mythical figure, the first Magyar of historical authenticity to see the shores of America was István Parmenius of Buda, a scholar, Oxford student and poet of talent. This widely respected ancestor of Hungarian Americans, Parmenius, was invited by Sir Humphrey Gilbert to join his expedition to Newfoundland and, since Sir Humphrey was a vain man, to commemorate the glorious journey in verse. In his only extant letter from this journey written to his friend Richard Hakluyt in London, Parmenius says he found the land bleak and the only animals were bears of white fur that could swim—possibly the first account of polar bears. He died on August 29, 1583 on board the good ship Delight that sank in the bay of St Johns on the shores of Newfoundland. Two centuries elapsed before the next pioneer enters the stage. The heroic Mihály Kováts, the commander appointed by George Washington at the Continental Congress in 1778 to lead the Pulaski legion. In the sources his name varies from Cowatch to Kowatz to Kowatch to-Kovatch-to-Kovach. The uncertainty surrounding his name was finally resolved by a chance discovery in the Library of Congress in 1927: the great bibliographer and book collector Károly Feleky, found a letter written to Washington by the colonel that bore his autograph. He signed it as of Michael de Kováts. Kováts died a hero's death in the battle of Charlestown in 1779.

New Jersey is a state with a more than average concentration of Hungarians: the figures show that currently about 170,000 people of Hungarian origin live in New Jersey. Early in the 19th century, one of the first settlers from Hungary was a certain Attila Kelemen, a miracle healer. Leaving behind his old-world career of dressmaker's apprentice, Kelemen emigrated to Newark, N.J. and worked for an apothecary in the 1840s. During an epidemic, he started selling a patent medicine of his own making, *"tincturus papricus"* which sold like hot cakes and made him very rich. Later on Kelemen lived in New York in a fashionable area, but it remained a secret for a long time that *tincturus papricus* was in fact paprika in a *pálinka* solution. The first famous Hungarian in New Jersey was General Lázár Mészáros, who settled on a farm in 1852 as a prominent figure of the 1848 Revolution and a member of the Kossuth emigration.

New Brunswick is renowned for two things: the main campuses of Rutgers University and the headquarters of the multinational company Johnson & Johnson. Situated in the vicinity of Princeton—the home of the Ivy League university—New Brunswick lies on the banks of the Raritan River and is less than an hour's ride from New York on the New York–Trenton railroad. It has exercised an attraction for Hungarians in the United States for generations—although it is not one of the original Hungarian settlements such as New Buda, Ia., or Kossuth, Pa., or Arpádhon, La. New Brunswick took its name as early as 1716. 1766 saw the foundation in the city of the college later named Rutgers, chronologically the eighth among the great American schools of higher education. The first Hungarian family arrived in 1888, the year after Johnson & Johnson was incorporated—two facts linked by a century of close relationship and mutual respect. Very soon, the stream

of Hungarian migration began to flow. Johnson & Johnson recruited Hungarians to New Brunswick. The company was the single most important employer for almost a century: there was a time when 60 per cent of the total workforce in Johnson & Johnson local plants was Hungarian. (The other major employer—located on Somerset Street —was the cigar factory.) The most Hungarian of American cities, wrote Géza Kende, author of *Magyarok Amerikában*—Hungarians in America, 1927—New Brunswick even topped Cleveland in terms of the ratio of Magyars. Proportionally it once had more Hungarians than any other city in the United States of America. In earlier periods one third of the city's population was of Hungarian origin; now this has fallen to some ten percent.

Following the waves of immigration in the period up to the outbreak of World War I and the reduced influx in interwar years caused by the quota system, World War II and its aftermath brought a new type of immigrant, the displaced persons or DPs. The DPs in turn were replaced by the Freedom Fighters. In the wake of the 1956 Revolution, great numbers of refugees came to the USA and the planes carrying them flew in from Europe to New Brunswick, to the city's military compound named after the poet Alfred Joyce Kilmer who was born in New Brunswick (1886–1918). As part of the Hungarian Escapee Program, volunteers served in the Camp Kilmer operation of resettling refugees. While many chose to live elsewhere in the United States, many Hungarians remained in the city and its surroundings.

Long before the generation of 56ers, the Hungarian settlers and immigrants had formed their organizations, churches, societies, and clubs in America in general and in New Brunswick in particular. Obviously, the churches were the most active force in building up a specific Hungarian community life. Different denominations founded their congregations before or around the turn of the century; six churches and one synagogue in New Brunswick were founded by Hungarians. Within a short walking distance are the church and annex school of the Catholic St Ladislas, (founded in 1903), the First Magyar Reformed Church (Presbyterian, 1903), the Greek Rite Catholic St Joseph Church (1915), the Magyar Reformed Church (1915), the First Magyar Baptist Church (1918), the Jewish Orthodox Congregation (1918), and the First Magyar Ascension (Lutheran) Church (1913). Along with the churches came fraternities and mutual benefit and medical aid societies. Going slightly beyond the city limits, in 1882 the First Hungarian Sick and Death Benefit Society was founded in Newark, N.J. In 1886, the Verhovay Fraternal Insurance Association was established by thirteen miners in Hazelton, Pa. The Verhovay local branches quickly increased in number nationwide: 160 settlements had formed branches by 1909. The Verhovay changed its name several times until, in 1952, it merged with another society, the Rákóczi Aid Association. Shedding both their names, which they considered a liability in business, the two societies adopted a name with an American overtone: the new society, the William Penn Association, was named after the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania. Today, modernized along lines of commercial insurance practices, it is the largest Hungarian association in America.

Another early fraternity was The Hungarian Reformed Federation of America founded in Trenton, N.J. in 1896. Although there were serious merger negotiations with the William Penn Association, the former body finally refused because the William Penn Association was not prepared in the early 1980s to return to an ethnic Hungarian framework to the required degree. Still, the William Penn Association continues to support energetically the Hungarian heritage programs. Mention must be made of the civic clubs, women's clubs, charities, and the Hungarian Athletic Club (1913). The Hungarian Scout Association was founded in the 1950s and an umbrella organization named Hungarian Civic Association was set up in 1975.

Commensurate with this rich past, as early as 1909, a printing press was established, where the newspaper *Magyar Hírnök* was produced. At one time in New Jersey there were eighteen Hungarian-language papers. Today, *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* (founded by Géza D. Berkó in New York in 1899) survives as a weekly, merged with another old paper *Szabadság* (founded in 1891 by Tihamér Kohányi in Cleveland).

Vestiges of an Hungarian presence are still there all over New Brunswick. There is a Kossuth Park, a Mindszenty Square (the Cardinal visited New Brunswick in 1973), a Magyar Savings Bank founded in 1922 by Hungarians, a Duna Bar, a Budapest Cocktail Lounge. There is a stone monument in memory of the Revolution, unveiled at Camp Kilmer on the fifth anniversary of the 1956 Revolution, displaying the gratitude of Hungarian refugees who were given shelter and could start a new life in the States. In 1976, a bronze statue of Cardinal József Mindszenty was erected in the courtyard of St Ladislas Parish on Somerset Street.

The American Hungarian Foundation is a focal point of all this: its goal is to serve as a bridge between the Hungarian and American cultural traditions. The year 1999 was exceptional for the Foundation in several ways. In May, there was a celebration to commemorate its 45th anniversary as well as the 40th of the Hungarian Studies program at Rutgers University. There was also another anniversary, that of the building and facilities comprising the

Hungarian Heritage Center, the seat of the American Hungarian Foundation. Ten years previously, in 1989, the Foundation had moved into this attractive and functional building designed by László Papp.

Founded in 1954, the American Hungarian Foundation is now run by President August J. Molnár and a Board of Directors headed by Chairman Zsolt Harsányi. Professor Molnár, an exceptionally erudite man who holds a number of academic degrees in linguistics, literature, theology, and Hungarian studies from Elmhurst College, University of Michigan and Rutgers University, called Guszti bácsi by one and all and is as tireless as ever. He has been active in many initiatives since the beginnings, and his strenuous dedication— along with the generous donation of the sponsors—made the Heritage Center a reality. It was under his direction that the Edmund Vasváry Collection, the richest collection of ethnic Hungarians in America, was microfilmed in 1978 and the original donated to Szeged, Ödön Vasváry's hometown, and deposited in the Somogyi Library.

Due to its activities in promoting the cohesion of the community and keeping many American Hungarians in close touch with their traditions, the American Hungarian Foundation has captured the attention of other minority communities. During my stay, Italian community leaders visited the Center and bombarded Professor Molnár with questions about organizing a successful community life. On another occasion, a Chinese delegation with similar questions paid a visit to him. Professor Molnár himself is not an immigrant in the US as he was born in Cleveland in 1927. This makes his achievement and lifelong dedication to the Hungarian cause in the USA all the more remarkable.

The Foundation's wide-ranging programs include exhibitions, annual events, the George Washington Awards Dinner, student and scholar exchanges, publications, academic programs and so forth. The Foundation publishes the quarterly *Hungarian Studies Newsletter,* edited by Andrew Ludanyi. The 55/57 number for 1999 has recently appeared.

The Hungarian Heritage Center is a complex with a courtyard, conference rooms, administration offices, a museum, and one of the finest Hungarian libraries in the US. Since its opening in 1989, the Center and its Museum has been visited by 75,000 to view thirty-two exhibitions. Titles of earlier exhibits: Two Hundred Years of Hungarian Painting; Budapest 1900 in Photographs; Louis Kossuth in Hungary. Recent exhibitions were: Treasures of the Jewish Hungarian Community; Retrospective of photojournalist Suzanne Szasz; Joseph Domján: Painter and Master of the Woodcut; Retrospective of the Father of Op Art: Victor Vasarely. In May 1999, a multi-media exhibition titled 'Hungarian Spark in America' was arranged in the Museum. The exhibits are arranged in the order of arts, science, commerce, sports, civic life, medicine, music, intellectual and mechanical achievements, movies, and business—with a 12-minute video. Preparations are now afoot to launch a new exhibition in the Museum in March 2000. Titled 'Munkácsy in America: Works of a Celebrated Hungarian Painter from American Collectors', the exhibition will honor the centenary of Mihály Munkácsy's death.

My activity was based on an agreement between the Fulbright Commission, the American Hungarian Foundation, and the National Széchényi Library, Budapest; the aim was to strengthen the professional presence in the Foundation's collections. Years ago, Ilona Kovács of the Széchényi Library, a librarian specializing in *Hungarica* collections in foreign countries, had surveyed a number of American libraries and had her findings published. I agreed with her approach to promoting the major Hungarian academic institutions abroad by engaging a professionally qualified staff. I took her work as a point of departure for assessing the material deposited at the American Hungarian Foundation, and we kept up an intense exchange of messages throughout my stay. This also involved a strong supporter of the program and earlier director of the Széchényi Library, Géza Poprády. My research primarily concerned this collection of books and archives, and included devising plans and concepts on digitization and online access as well as contributing to the design, maintenance, and upgrading of the American Hungarian Foundation's homepage. I regarded my assignment as a cultural mission to enhance involvement of Hungarians in the Center's programs. A librarian's task always includes responding to reference questions, and so did mine; in most cases the inquiries pertained to genealogy or family history. Sometimes agencies sought our help in historically related cases. (For instance, I provided a background essay to verify the authenticity of a letter written by József Makk (Mack), a Kossuth exile, to Abraham Lincoln, which a publisher had wanted to put up for auction.)

The Library of the American Hungarian Foundation has a collection of ca. 40,000 volumes, and its Archives contain a treasure of papers, photographs, and other memorabilia. Second only to the Library of Congress' collection of Hungarian material in the USA, the Foundation's Library is a rich depository of papers and bequests of American Hungarians with a wealth of *Hungarica* featuring gems like the *Thuróczi Chronicle* (1488). The collection's origin goes back to Károly Feleky. A musician who emigrated to the US in 1884 from his native Békéscsaba, Feleky became a first-class bibliographer and collector of books on Hungarian subjects. When he died in 1930 his books were sold to the Hungarian

state, which established the Hungarian Reference Library in New York in 1938. After World War II and with the advent of the Cold War, the bulk of the Hungarian Reference Library was acquired by the Library of Congress, and a portion of Feleky's original collection eventually came into the possession of the American Hungarian Foundation. Today the Library is an affiliate of the Rutgers University System, sharing its online catalog. But there is a great deal of professional processing to be done. As for the Archives, the primary task is to make an inventory of the manuscripts. In 1998, the trustees of the Ligonier, Pa.-based Bethlen Home, decided to salvage its archival material of exceptional historical value in hazardous storage and transferred the material to the vaults of the Hungarian Heritage Center. In addition, the Center houses another unique manuscript collection: the William Penn Foundation papers. The American Hungarian Foundation is obligated by considerable donations to make progress in processing these archives so as to provide for a limited accessibility in the future. Currently, this is being done by András Csillag, a Fulbright grantee himself, a PhD historian from Szeged, who had been the curator of the Vasváry Collection for five years.

Speaking about financing: it is indeed a mystery not only to Italians and Chinese how the Foundation manages to survive financially and to be involved in so many programs. A decade ago, relying upon donations and a great deal of volunteer work and renting out rooms, the Foundation's management succeeded in financing the construction of the Hungarian Heritage Center based upon, the Challenge Fund /Phase One. This netted 3 million dollars: the first private donor was Dr Nicholas L. Deak, and the first corporate donor Johnson & Johnson. The city of New Brunswick and the Nicolas M. Salgo Charitable Trust also provided generous sums. Some time ago a new initiative was launched: the Challenge Fund /Phase Two. It is an ambitious plan to collect 10 million dollars in order to sponsor an expanding program and to take care of the collections and archives rendering these treasures available to research and public view.

The George Washington Award, another annual traditional event staged by the American Hungarian Foundation, was inspired by a statue of George Washington unveiled in the City Park in Budapest in 1906. It was a gift of the Hungarians of America to the memory of Washington. Tihamér Kohányi, the editor of *Szabadság*, organized the American effort. With the help of the then Mayor of Budapest, István Bárczy, the event was a grand celebration. Kohányi presented the statue to the Hungarian capital, pointing out in his address that the Hungarian-American could help to build a closer and warmer relationship between the two nations, America and Hungary. He added that as a gift from Hungarian immigrants in America, the statue was an expression of gratitude to the memory of Washington and to their adopted country, though they didn't forget the land of their birth.

The Washington Award laureates of 1998 were the architect László Papp and Rabbi Arthur Schneier. A 1956 refugee and the designer of the Hungarian Heritage Center, László Papp has been an active public figure, holding posts like the Regional Director of the American Institute of Architects. Similarly, Rabbi Schneier has served on a number of goodwill delegations appointed by presidents of the US; he was also a member of the US Presidential Delegation for the Return of the Crown of St Stephen to Hungary in 1978. The 37th George Washington Award in 1999 was a departure from the usual routine: along with two American-Hungarians, István Deák, the Columbia University professor of Central European history, and Lajos Schmidt, a lawyer and executive of Baker & McKenzie, who helped boost American investment in Hungary, there was a Hungary-based Hungarian laureate, Imre Somody. As president of Pharmavit Co. and vice president of Mead Johnson—following a number of awards in Hungary such as Man of the Year and Manager of the Year, Somody earned the award for his charitable work embodied at the Misszió Health Center at Veresegyháza and elsewhere.

The Hungarian Studies Program at Rutgers was strengthened and revitalized in 1991 thanks to an agreement with the Hungarian Ministry of Culture. Francis Lawrence, the President of Rutgers, one of whose grandparents came from Budapest, launched the Institute for Hungarian Studies and appointed Professor József Böröcz as its head to promote and coordinate Hungarian studies (the Institute's website: hi.rutgers.edu/hi). Professor Böröcz recently reemphasized his commitment to sustained cooperation with the American Hungarian Foundation in organizing programs and cultural and academic events. ❑