# The Restricted Design Competition for the New York Life Insurance Company Building in Budapest

## A Late Nineteenth-Century International Design Competition in Central Europe

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**Abstract**

Rapid industrialization and urbanization in Europe and the United States introduced new building types and new methods of construction, leading to important changes in the architectural landscape of major cities. Public and corporate construction proliferated, and design competitions were called upon to identify architectural projects that best suited the needs of a particular state institution or private company. Although initially these competitions were open to all members of the architectural profession, towards the end of the nineteenth century, their format changed to be more effective, with only a restricted number of architects competing for the commission. The present paper focuses on the competition for the New York Life Palace in Budapest and sheds light on its connections with the international trends.

## Introduction

[1.] During the second half of the nineteenth century, Budapest, the capital of Hungary, was one of the most rapidly growing cities in Europe; by the 1910s, it had become one of the largest on the continent.1 Europe and post-Civil War United States became closer partners regarding economy, technology and, to a certain extent, architecture. The pace of economic development in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was unprecedented on both ends.2 The development of transportation and communication media created new opportunities for an international capitalism, and modern forms of foreign investments appeared in the industrialised countries.3 Corporations now

1 Gabor Preisich, *Budapest városépítésének története Buda visszavételétől a II. világháború végéig* [The Building History of Budapest from the Battle of Buda to the End of the Second World War], Budapest 2004, 42.

2 Ronald Findlay and Kevin H. O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium*, Princeton 2007, 378.

3 Findlay and O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty*, 395.

ventured into portfolio investments abroad,4 and this provided opportunities for major architectural projects. Several western companies invested into Central and Eastern Europe and had prestigious buildings constructed in cities like Budapest.

[2.] The late nineteenth century not only brought about an economic revolution, but also a technical one in the fields of engineering and architecture. Steel – the most important new material of the century – allowed architects to design increasingly taller structures; the use of skeleton frames enabled the buildings to grow to a scale never seen before. In the United States, where laissez-faire capitalism prevailed,5 cities did not prohibit high-rise buildings. So, as technical innovations made such construction projects possible,6 skyscrapers appeared and changed the skylines in the New World forever. Meanwhile, in Europe, investors had to follow stricter urban regulations than in the United States, which had to do with such aspects of building construction as street line allignment, the main cornice height, the number of stories, and the fire prevention ordinances.7 Consequently, although the Old World economy did not prosper any less, cityscapes did not change as dramatically; nevertheless, the late-nineteenth century architecture benefited greatly from the global prosperity of the era.8 The architectural style of these decades, late historicism, is characterized by a combination of various elements from different historical periods resulting in new and unconventional combinations.9

[3.] Before the 1800s, towers and cupolas had a specific historical function in architecture; beside their aesthetic value, their purpose was to symbolise the power and greatness of religious and political authorities. They never lost their symbolism entirely, but by the end of the nineteenth century, they came to play a secondary decorative role in the overall design, that of emphasizing verticality. Although in many European cities height restriction laws were imposed, additional towers or cupolas were allowed to exceed the set height. Consequently, skylines in numerous great metropolises of Europe came to be dominated by historicist towers and cupolas. This happened in parallel with the construction of early skyscrapers in North America. Although these modern

4 Findlay and O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty*, 424.

5 Cynthia Clark, *The American Economy: A Historical Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., Santa Barbara, CA 2011, 265.

6 Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*: *The Growth of a New Tradition*, Cambridge, MA 1967 (first published by Harvard University Press 1941), 350.

7 Preisich, *Budapest városépítésének története Buda visszavételétől a II. világháború végéig*, 97.

8 Robin Middleton and David Watkin, *Neoclassical and 19th Century Architecture*, vol. 1: *The Enlightenment in France and in England*, Milan 1987, 32.

9 Deborah Silverman, "The Paris Exhibition of 1889: Architecture and the Crisis of Individualism", in: *Oppositions* 8 (1977), 70–91.

towers differed greatly from the European buildings in terms of their structure or size, upon closer examination, the similarity of certain architectural elements is evident, since in both cases the decorative details were articulated in a way that closely resembled European historicism.

[4.] A new type of buildings, the commercial and industrial company headquarters, emerged at that moment.10 As these enterprises started to grow, they constructed greater and more prestigious edifices for themselves, which were meant to express their power and stability.11 After the American Civil War, there was a period of economic growth in the United States, and many American companies started to develop closer business relations with the European countries. This lead to real estate investments with the purpose of creating local headquarters that were also meant to be "standing advertisements". Banks and insurance companies were among the pioneers in the areas of modern advertising and public relations, recognising the significance of the expressive power of architecture quite early in the process. Since they offered no material product for sale, erecting spectacular buildings became especially important for these enterprises to gain the trust of their potential customers.12

[5.] During the nineteenth century, not only the construction and design methods, but the practice of architecture itself underwent significant changes. Guilds that regulated most of the professions since the Middle Ages were gradually replaced with the modern system of chambers of crafts. This modernisation occurred following the emergence of the Enlightenment ideas in the late eighteenth century, which resulted in an increasing public demand for a more democratic way of selecting the architect that would receive the commission. In the West, instead of direct commissions, a preference for the process of open competitions for major architectural projects developed.13 Design competitions became the symbol of society's commitment to civic progress in the field of architecture.14 The United States played the leading role in spreading this method as their government was the first to announce open public design competitions in 1792.15 By the early 1900s, architectural

10 Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, *History of Building Types*, Princeton 1976, 213.

11 Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Harmondsworth 1977, 327.

12 Landmarks Preservation Commission, Designation List 187 LP-1513, New York, February 10, 1987, see: https://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/lp/1513.pdf, p. 6.

13 Hilde De Haan and Ids Haagsma, eds., *Architects in Competition: International Architectural Competitions of the Last 200 Years*, London 1988, 7.

14 Joan Bassin, *Architectural Competitions in Nineteenth-Century England*, Ann Arbor 1984, 6.

15 Both the competition for the White House and the US Capitol were held in 1792. Erik Mattie and Ceres De Jong, eds., *Architectural Competitions 1792 – Today*, Cologne 1994, 19.

competitions were considered to be common practice in the case of major building projects – both private and public. The present paper examines the evolution of design competitions in Hungary during the era of historicism.16 It focuses on the restricted competition for the New York Life Insurance Company's palace in Budapest and its international context.17

## Company Buildings in Europe

[6.] In the second half of the nineteenth century, several international enterprise buildings appeared in the continental Europe, the primary intent of which was to emphasize the company's brand. Needing to stand out from the ordinary apartment houses that dominated European cities, most of these buildings had a very peculiar form. Two American insurance companies: the Equitable and the New-York Life were the most powerful ones at that moment, and both of them had interests in Europe.18 They built representative office buildings in New York City after the Civil War, and as their incomes progressively increased during the 1880s, they decided to construct prestigious company buildings for their European subsidiaries.19 The New York Life Insurance Company opened its first local branch in the United Kingdom in 1870, and then established its first European Branch office in 1876 in central Paris. The annual income of the

16 The research is largely based on a review of the nineteenth-century architectural press, considering all available information regarding competitions in Hungary between 1890 and 1920. The authors have previously published some of this material: Márton Székely and Katalin Marótzy, "Design Competition for the Fonciére Palace, Andrássy Avenue, Budapest", in: *Periodica Polytechnica Architecture* 46 (2015), no. 1, 29–37 (http://periodicapolytechnica.org/ar/article/view/8224/6805); Márton Székely and Katalin Marótzy, "Design Competitions for the Queen Elizabeth Memorial in Budapest", in: *Architectura Hungariae* 14 (2015), no. 2, 37-50 (http://arch.et.bme.hu/wp-content/uploads/epaper/AH_vol14_no2_pp37-50_SzekelyMarotzy/index.html); Márton Székely and Katalin Marótzy, "Imre Steindl's Neo-Gothic Approaches at Design Competitions in the 1870's", in: *Architektura & Urbanizmus* 40 (2016), no. 1-2, 66–77; Márton Székely and Katalin Marótzy, "The Architectural Design Competition as a Phenomenon in Late 19th-Century Hungary", in: *Architectonics and Architecture, Bulletin of the Section of Engineering Sciences of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences* 47 (2018), no. 1-2, 1–26. https://akademiai.com/doi/abs/10.1556/096.2017.001

17 There is a growing international interest in research into architectural competitions. Recent publications regarding the subject include: Jean-Pierre Chupin, Carmela Cucuzzella and Bechara Hela, eds., *Architecture Competitions and the Production of Culture, Quality and Knowledge. An International Inquiry*, Montreal 2015, and Jonas Andersson, Gerd Zettersten and Magnus Rönn, eds., *Architectural Competitions – Histories and Practice*, Stockholm 2013.

18 Cynthia Clark, *The American Economy: A Historical Encyclopedia,* Santa Barbara 2011, 673.

19 In Berlin, both companies constructed their respective headquarter offices, but in the case of Budapest, only the New York Life Insurance Company did.

European Branch – excluding Great Britain – increased from 374,000 to 1,384,000 dollars from 1876 to 1882.20 In 1884, New York Life purchased a classicist mid-nineteenth-century apartment house in Paris (Fig. 1a), near the famous Opéra Garnier.21

1 New York Life Buildings in a) Paris, b) Berlin and c) Vienna (reprod. from: James Monroe Hudnut, *Semi-Centennial History of the New-York Life Insurance Company 1845–1895*, New York 1895, 211, 215, 217)

Their offices occupied just one part of the building, with apartments taking up most of the space, and a café occupying the ground-floor. Noticeably, the company has added a new clock-tower to the corner of the house that later became a common means of aesthetic enhancement.

[7.] In the late 1880s, New York Life completed office buildings in Kansas City, Omaha, St. Paul, Montreal, and Minneapolis.22 The Kansas City building featured an eagle sculpture above its main entrance, created by the American sculptor Louis Saint-Gaudens (1851–1913). Later, replicas of this work were installed on the company buildings in Omaha and St. Paul. During these same years, the corporation decided to build new local headquarters for their most successful subsidiaries in Europe. The executive board chose four cities: Berlin, Amsterdam, Vienna, and Budapest.23 Presumably, the main goal of the American management was to advertise themselves in the most booming European cities

20 James Monroe Hudnut, *Semi-Centennial History of the New-York Life Insurance Company 1845–1895,* New York 1895, 210.

21 Hudnut, *Semi-Centennial History of the New-York Life Insurance Company*, 211.

22 All of them without an open design competition. The company commissioned the architects directly. Hudnut, *Semi-Centennial History of the New-York Life Insurance Company*, 237.

23 James Monroe Hudnut, *History of the New-York Life Insurance Company, 1895–1905*, New York 1906, 173.

of the period.24 In the years that followed, land lots were purchased in Berlin25 (Fig. 1b) and in Vienna26 (Fig. 1c). By 1887, both of these company buildings were completed.27 The Equitable opened its Berlin headquarters28 (Fig. 2a) the same year.29

[8.] Research to date suggests that the New York Life Insurance Company wasn't clear on the intended function of the clock towers. However, they were not a common feature, even in the late nineteenth century, so they must have attracted public attention, and thus could have been chosen as a representative sign of the New York Life. The eagles were undoubtedly symbols not only of the enterprise itself, but of the United States in general, since these sculptures drew upon the national coat of arms. In each city, the company purchased property that ensured that their buildings would be clearly visible; for instance, all of them were located on major intersections, which is very unlikely to be a matter of mere coincidence. Unlike in the Anglo-Saxon cities, in continental Europe these corporate buildings had mixed functions: premises were usually located on the ground floor, offices on the first floor, and apartments on the upper storeys.30

24 There is no mention in the available literature of the motivation behind the company's choice of these particular cities; they were, however, capital cities.

25 Hudnut, *Semi-Centennial History of the New-York Life Insurance Company*, 215.

26 Hudnut, *Semi-Centennial History of the New-York Life Insurance Company*, 217.

27 The building in Berlin was designed by two German architects: Heinrich Joseph Kayser (1842–1917) and Karl von Grossheim (1841–1911), who was the president of the Prussian Academy of Arts.

28 Designed by the German architect Carl Schäfer (1844–1908). Ralf Mennekes, *Die Renaissance der Deutschen Renaissance*, Petersberg 2005, 146.

29 Francesco Dal Co, *Figures of Architecture and Thought: German Architectural Culture, 1880-1920*, New York 1990, 298.

30 This arrangement is rooted in the local urban traditions of high-density living in continental cities as opposed to England and America. Hitchcock 1977, 350.

2 a) Equitable Life Building in Berlin (reprod. from: *Architektur der Gegenwart*, vol. 2, pl. 32), and New York Life Buildings in b) Amsterdam, and c) Budapest (reprod. from: Hudnut 1895, 213, 219)

[9.] In 1890/91, New York Life purchased land parcels for their new edifices in Amsterdam31 and Budapest32. The Amsterdam building, designed by the Dutch architect Jan van Looy (1852–1911), opened in 1892 (Fig. 2b), and the Budapest New York Life palace, designed by the Hungarian architect Alajos Hauszmann (1847–1926), was inaugurated in October 1894 in the presence of the American management (Fig. 2c). The unifying feature of these buildings was the addition of the characteristic tower, often with an integrated clock. This latter element could have been motivated by marketing reasons: as life insurances were acquired for a lifetime, a clock always showing the time could serve as an expressive trademark. While company skyscrapers in America merely stood out in terms of their height, late nineteenth-century European corporate buildings relied on specific architectural elements – such as cupolas and steeples – to stand out and stand for the greatness of their respective companies. And while decorative towers, steeples, spires, ornaments and allegoric sculptures were widely used in late nineteenth-century architecture, the motif of an eagle feeding its eaglets is unique to the New York Life buildings.

[10.] Following the completion of these five33 branches in Europe, New York Life started on the construction of their head office with a monumental clock tower (Fig. 3a) in New York City (1894–1898). The designers were the American architect Stephen Hatch (1839–1894), and later the architectural firm McKim & Mead. Apart from the tower clock, the decoration shows no impact of the previous European projects. Then, in 1898, the enterprise announced a design competition for a new building in Paris, at the same location as the existing company office. The jury awarded three submissions, with Georges Morin-Goustiaux's (1859–1909) & Le Cardonnel's (1862–1936) plan receiving the first prize.34 The new building opened in 1900 with the lavish Café Riche on the ground floor (Fig. 3b).35

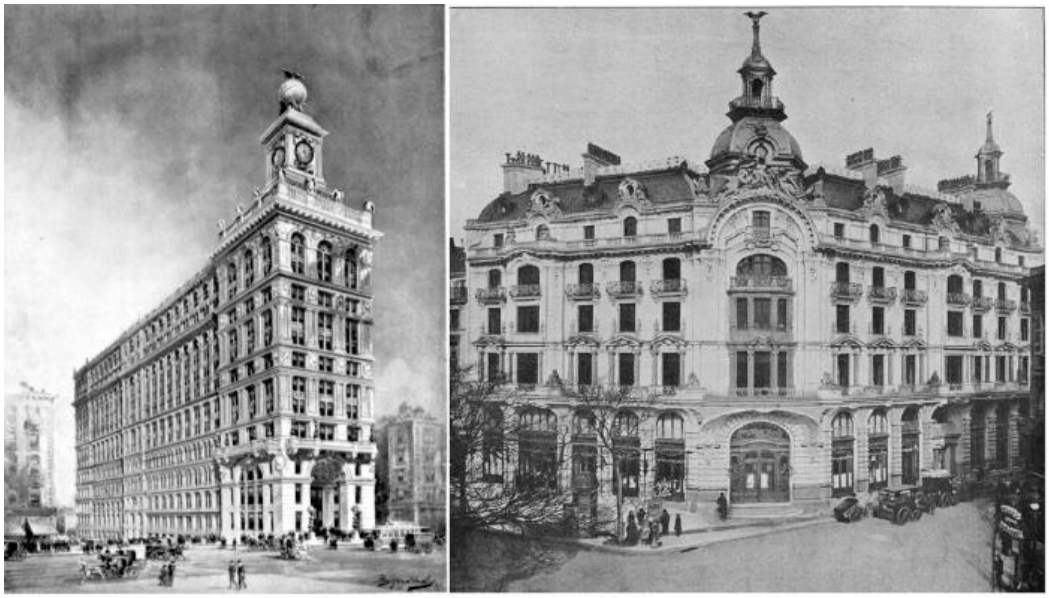
31 Hudnut, *Semi-Centennial History of the New-York Life Insurance Company*, 213.

32 Hudnut, *Semi-Centennial History of the New-York Life Insurance Company*, 219.

33 A sixth building might have been built in Belgrade, probably between 1895 and 1905. But there is only one mention of it, with no further information found so far. Hudnut, *History of the New-York Life Insurance Company*, 172.

34 Cf. *La Construction Moderne* 14 (1898), 216.

35 The fashionable cafés on the ground floor produced additional revenues for the company and attracted the public further improving the company's image.



3 (a) New York Life Building in New York City, 1896 (reprod. from: Hudnut 1895, frontispiece) | (b) the second New York Life Building in Paris, 1900 (reprod. from: *La construction moderne* 16 (1900), pl. 59)

Apparently, the company decided not to hire American architects. If a competition did take place, a local architect was chosen instead, as is often the case with direct commissions. It would seem that besides the matters of publicity, it was the firm's official policy for their offices to blend in with their architectural environment. Consequently, the visual appearance of these buildings echoed that of their immediate surroundings. Local architects would also have been better acquainted with the local construction methods and regulations, which must have significantly simplified the entire process. An excerpt from the company's history book, published in 1906, illustrates the importance of these European properties for the company:

*During this time, the New-York Life began and completed with a few exceptions, the eleven office buildings – five in this country and six in Europe – which have enlisted a powerful community sentiment in favour of the Company, besides furnishing local headquarters and an investment for its continually increasing funds. These buildings have given American policy-holders in their vicinity a sense of ownership in the Company, and have been a standing advertisement of no small value.*36

## The Competition for the New York Life Palace in Budapest

[11.] The first modern architectural design competition in Hungary took place in 1844 and concerned the plans for a new parliament building in Budapest

36 Hudnut, *History of the New-York Life Insurance Company*, 173.

(although it was not realised at the time).37 After the *Compromise of 1867,* a highly progressive era started in Hungary, providing prospects for a profound modernisation of the entire society. It resulted in a series of great national building projects that unfolded up until World War I.38 Furthermore, an increasing number of open competitions for state projects was held during this period; some well-known examples include the one for the Opera House in 1872, the Parliament Building in 1882, the Ministry of Culture in 1905, and the National Theatre in 1913. The practice of design competitions became the norm for public architecture of national significance, whereas commissions for private buildings remained for the most part direct. While we know much less of this latter type of competitions as there was not as much publicity, it is certain that at that moment their number was also increasing. Competitions for banks, insurance company buildings and headquarters of other private corporations became more frequent at the beginning of the twentieth century. An early example was the open contest for the Foncière Palace at the beginning of 1881.39 The Belgian insurance company had an interest in Hungary, so a decision was made to erect a conspicuously luxurious apartment house at a prestigious location in Budapest, at the start of Andrássy Avenue40 in the proximity of their existing headquarters. A total of fifty-eight submissions was received by the jury.41 Four equal first prizes of HUF 80042 were granted to Ödön Lechner (1845–1914),43 Gyula Pártos (1845–1916), Adolf Feszty (1846–1900), and Zsigmond Quittner (1859–1918). Eventually, Feszty, an innovative architect, was awarded the commission, and the building was completed by the end of 1882. The

37 This competition was not even judged due to the revolution of 1848. Another competition was held in 1882. This time, four equal first prizes were awarded to the restricted applicants, and a committee then decided on the final commission, which was awarded to Imre Steindl's Gothic-revival design. Barry Bergdoll, *European Architecture 1750–1890*, Oxford 2000, 168; Eszter Gábor, ed., *Az Ország Háza/ The House of the Nation. Buda-pesti országháza-tervek 1784-1884/ Parliament Plans for Buda-Pest 1784-1884,* exh. cat., Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 2000, 61.

38 Ákos Moravánszky, *Competing Visions: Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture, 1867–1918*, Cambridge, MA 1998.

39 Márton Székely and Katalin Marótzy, "Design Competition for the Fonciére Palace, Andrássy Avenue, Budapest - A Pivotal Moment", in: *Periodica Polytechnica Architecture* 46 (2015), no. 1, 29–37.

40 Prominent avenue in Budapest, built between 1872 and 1885.

41 Eight plans came from Vienna and fifty from Budapest, cf. "Concurrenz-Pläne für die Fonciére", in: *Bauzeitung für Ungarn* 6 (1881), 90.

42 *Építő Ipar* [Building Industry] 6 (1881), 141.

43 Ödön Lechner was the designer of the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest, which was one of Hungary's first non-historicist buildings. Regarding its style, the edifice is an eminent example of Hungarian art nouveau/ secession.

monumental cupola of the palace, with its height of sixty-seven metres, became an important Budapest landmark (Fig. 4a).44

4 (a) Foncière Palace in Budapest, 1890 (photograph: http://foto.fszek.hu/dsr/access/d33d8836-0384-4147-815a-aae7aedd0450) | (b) Gresham Palace in Budapest, 2015 (author's photograph)

The English Gresham Insurance Agency announced an open international competition for a new company building in Budapest in 1904. Zsigmond Quittner and József Vágó (1877–1947) shared the first prize and the commission.45 The Gresham Palace was built between 1905–1907 in the city center, just across from the famous Chain Bridge that was also becoming a significant element of the Danube bank cityscape (Fig. 4b).

[12.] During the last third of the nineteenth century, under the imperial and royal monarchy of Austria-Hungary, urban development was especially active and expansive. The cityscape changed mainly due to projects of foreign investors with some previously discussed exceptions. However, the architectural identity of Budapest was predominently shaped by the local architects.46

## The Contestants

44 The building was completed in November 1882. Unfortunately, the spectacular cupola was heavily damaged during the Second World War siege of Budapest and later had to be dismantled.

45 József Sisa and Dora Wiebenson, eds., *The Architecture of Historic Hungary,* Cambridge, MA 1998, 121.

46 The most notable foreign contribution was by Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer, two Viennese architects who specialised in theatre architecture. They also constructed several theatre buildings in Hungary, provoking discontent among the members of the Hungarian architectural society. Iskra Buschek, Johanna Flitsch and Tina Lipsky, *Fellner & Helmer: die Architekten der Illusion – Theaterbau und Bühnenbild in Europa*, Graz 1999.

[13.] The 1891 competition for the New York Life Palace in Budapest was quite unusual and generated exceptional public interest. The firm had opened its local branch in 1886, but it was able to acquire a building site that met their requirements of size and location only five years later.47 The company had been looking for a location where no other building would have been able to rival its headquarters in terms of appearence. Therefore, the management wished to avoid the old city center, with its many outstanding structures, and turned their attention to the Grand Boulevard that was already under construction. It differed from the recently completed Andrássy Avenue, as it was less aristocratic, more commercial and lively. Eventually, a site large enough for the intended structure was found on the Elizabeth Boulevard, a section of the Grand Boulevard. The site was located at a breakpoint of the boulevard line, so the tower became even more visible from a distant viewpoint. The company eventually purchased the building lot in January 1891.48 Right after the acquisition of the site, a design competition was announced.49 It was a restricted contest: the company invited twelve renowned Hungarian architects of the time. Unfortunately, currently there are no sources available to explain how the participants were chosen or to confirm who was invited. However, a statement was published in the most well-known Hungarian architectural journal, *Építő Ipar* [Building Industry], from which it is possible to identify, with some degree of certainty, some of them.50 This statement was released to eliminate the rumours that a number of contestants thought the competition was unfair and refused to participate. It was signed by a number of well-known architects who ultimately did not submit an entry, although could have been invited: Győző Czigler (1850–1905), Ödön Lechner, József Kauser (1855–1920), and Gyula Pártos. Czigler was a famous university professor and architect of some notable buildings in Budapest such as the Széchenyi Spa. Lechner happened to be the most inventive architect of his age in terms of style; his secessionist buildings such as the Museum of Applied Arts still add their unique flair to the Budapest cityscape. Kauser accomplished the largest

47 We do not have any information on how the decision regarding which site should be purchased was made, but Hauszmann claimed in his article that the company waited five years because they could not find a suitable location earlier. Alajos Hauszmann, "A New-York életbiztosító társulat budapesti palotája" [The Palace of the New-York Life Insurance Company in Budapest], in: *Magyar Mérnök és Építészegylet Közlönye* [Gazette of the Association of Hungarian Engineers and Architects] 26 (1892), 321.

48 Hudnut, *Semi-Centennial History of the New-York Life Insurance Company*, 210.

49 The call for proposals has never been made public. It is safe to assume that the company had requested a grandiose coffee house on the ground floor and spaces for their own offices, as these elements can be found on every plan submitted. Several of the entries contained some sort of eagle statue but not all of them did, suggesting that this was not one of the requirements.

50*Építő Ipar* [Building Industry] 15 (1891), no. 19, 167.

church in Budapest, St. Stephen's Basilica, after fifty years of construction.51 Pártos had worked together with Lechner on several projects in the 1880s including the Kecskemét town hall. Apart from this statement, there is no evidence at all that any of these architects participated in the competition.

[14.] By the competition deadline, July 31st, 1891, eight architects had submitted their projects; an additional project was submitted anonymously, presumably by an uninvited designer. Fortunately, all of these projects have been published, at least partially.52 The majority of the eight contestants had already achieved professional success by the time of the competition. János Bobula (1844–1903) was a master builder before he became an architect, and approached the questions of style in a rather conservative manner: he insisted on applying a pure kind of neo-Renaissance. Gyula Bukovics (1841–1914) began his architectural practice in the atelier of Miklós Ybl (1814–1891), the most influential architect of his period, master of the neo-Renaissance style and designer of the Hungarian Opera House. Bukovics' most important works are the Ministry of Agriculture in Budapest (1887) and the picturesque Chateau Schossberger at the village of Tura. Vilmos Freund (1846–1922) designed several city palaces on the prominent Andrássy Avenue. Alajos Hauszmann (1847–1926) was an acknowledged architect and a university professor; he held remarkable authority at that time and was in charge of the reconstruction of the royal palace in Buda and the seat of the Supreme Court. He was the first chairman of the Association of Hungarian Architects (MÉSZ) and was also very influential regarding the process of design competitions – he was often a member or even the president of the juries. Samu Pecz (1854–1922), the professor of Medieval Architecture at the University of Technology in Budapest, was the only one in this competition to prefer a medieval architectural style to the classical building style.53 He is remembered as the designer of the Great Market Hall of Budapest. Zsigmond Quittner also built some notable city palaces in the centre of Budapest such as the previously mentioned Gresham Palace. He also held some important positions and was the chairman of the Metropolitan Council of Utility Works and later of the MÉSZ.

## The Façade Proposals

[15.] All projects submitted to the competition followed the architectural trends of the time, notably late historicism. There were no art nouveau-style entries or

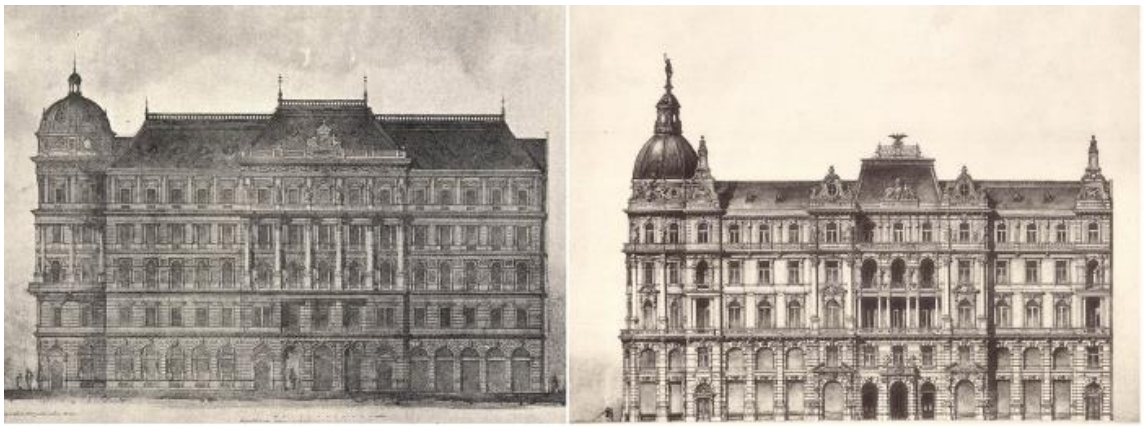
51 St. Stephen's Basilica was originally designed by József Hild (1789–1867), and continued by Miklós Ybl (1814–1891); Hild and Ybl were among the most well-known architects of their period in Hungary.

52 See *Magyar Mérnök és Építész Egylet Közlönye* [Gazette of the Association of Hungarian Engineers and Architects] 27 (1893), 29, 97, 193, 265, 393.

53 Pecz was a pupil of Friedrich Schmidt and continued applying the neo-Gothic style after Imre Steindl

any early modernist ones. It is worth taking a brief overview of the published projects,54 and address some of their defining features. Although the submissions to the competition combine elements from a variety of historical styles and periods, their originality did not lie in these stylistic choices, but in their volumetric and structural characteristics. The building's exterior had to emphasize its impressive dimensions and mass. In one way or another, all of the projects submitted to the competition emphasised the acute angle of the building, an element which had the potential of becoming its most distinguishing feature. Another one was the way the central part of the main façade facing the Grand Boulevard was articulated.

[16.] Three of the contestants chose to highlight the corner rather than the centre of the boulevard façade. Gyula Bukovics's design (Fig. 5a) showed a fairly plain façade with an accentuated central avant-corps. On the corner of the projected building, Bukovics added a circular tower with a hemispheric cupola. The composition is balanced: an elegant façade facing the Grand Boulevard seems very much in harmony with the additional corner tower.



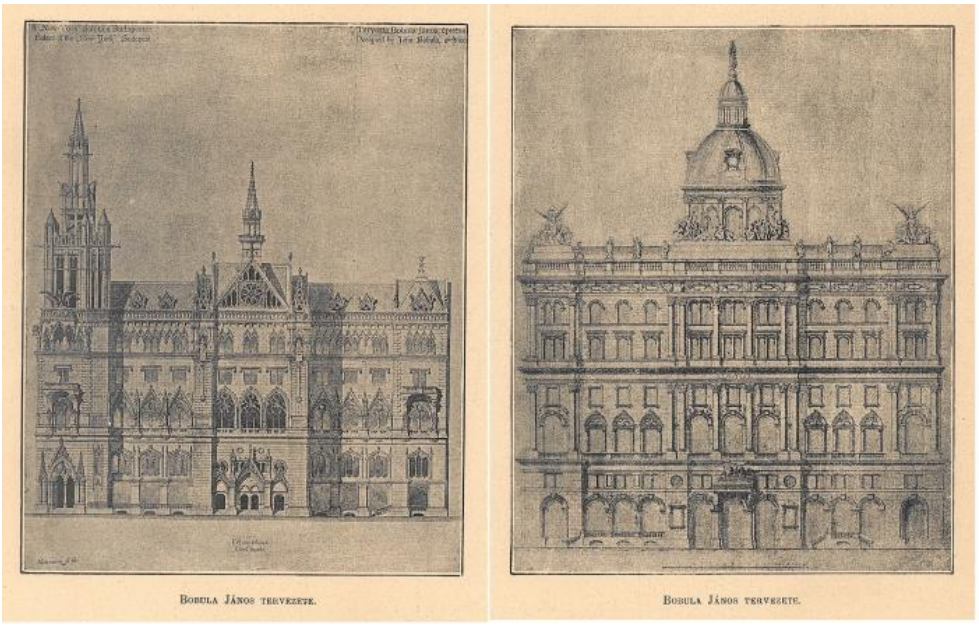
5 Proposals for the New York Life Building in Budapest, 1891, by a) Gyula Bukovics and b) Zsigmond Quittner (reprod. from: *Magyar Mérnök és Építészegylet Közlönye* (*MMÉEK*) [Gazette of the Association of Hungarian Engineers and Architects] 27 [1893], 397, pl. II)

Zsigmond Quittner's plan (Fig. 5b) suggested a more ornate design with an arrangement similar to Bukovics's. His project for the New York Life Building also combines a corner tower and a symmetrical main façade, but the cupola, in this case, is significantly higher and is topped by a lantern and a statue, accentuating the corner even more. The triple loggia on the main façade marks the central axis.55

54 Hauszmann, "A New-York életbiztosító társulat budapesti palotája", 321.

55 A similar composition can be found in Antal Szkalnitzky's University Library (1876) in Budapest.

[17.] János Bobula submitted two projects at the same time, one inspired by the Gothic (Fig. 6a), and the other by Classicism (Fig. 6b). Unfortunately, we know only of the elevation drawings of his plans, but it is nevertheless sufficient information to conclude that his two projects differed not only in the architectural style, but also in the way he articulates the mass of the building. The gothic-inspired design had a monumental tower on the corner that set up a major vertical accent, while on the classicist plan a huge cupola on a drum crowns the main façade. This second version by Bobula is less detailed, rather just a sketch, as its proportions differ apparently from the other version, it does not seem to fit to the same layout.




6 János Bobula, two proposals for the New York Life Building in Budapest, 1891: a) in a neo-Gothic style, and b) in a neo-Classical style (reprod. from: *Ország-Világ* 13 [1891], 626)

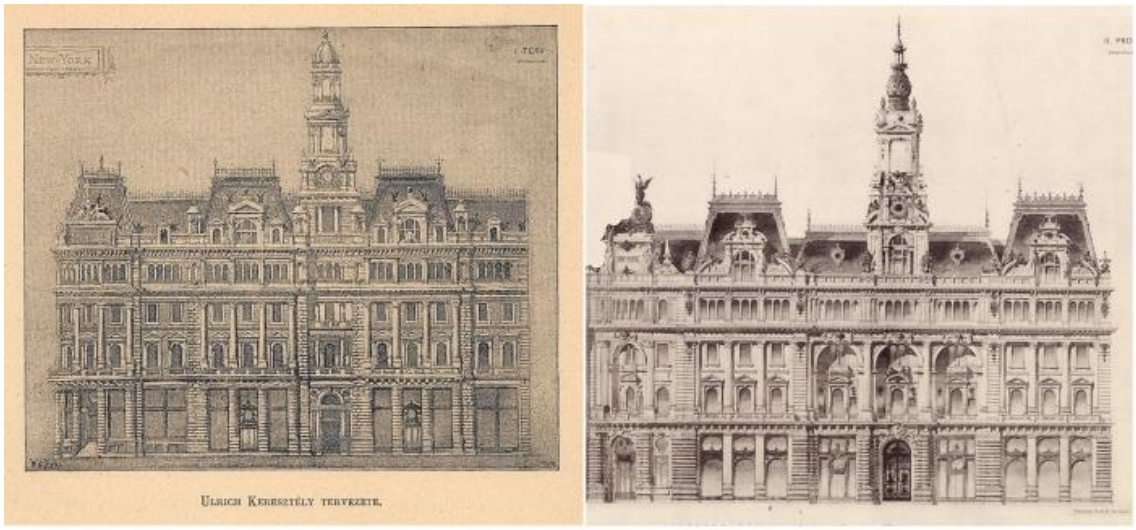
[18.] Samu Pecz's proposal in a medieval style (Fig. 7a) emphasizes the central part of the main façade by topping it with a particularly high steeple. Of all the projects submitted to the competition, this had the highest spire. He also added a corner cupola, but unlike the other designs, it was polygonal, not circular.

7 Proposals for the New York Life Building in Budapest, 1891, by a) Samu Pecz, and b) Vilmos Freund (reprod. from: *MMÉEK* 27 [1893], pl. III and V)

In his entry plan, Vilmos Freund (1846–1922) also emphasised the corner by adding a superstructure that functions as a kind of pedestal for a group of statues (Fig. 7b). He also added a smaller cupola to crown the middle section of the main façade, but the corner appears to dominate the overall view.

[19.] Antal Steinhardt (1856–1928) and Adolf Lang (1848–1913) approached their design for the New York Life Building in a very different manner (Fig. 8). They included many Gothic closed balconies, pediments and towers, and placed a cupola above the central part of the main façade, while the corner was also richly decorated with Gothic motifs, a German Renaissance pediment and an ornate clock. We can also observe a French influence in the shape of the roof.

8 Antal Steinhardt and Adolf Lang, proposal for the New York Life Building in Budapest, 1891 (reprod. from: *MMÉEK* 27 [1893], pl. XII)




9 Keresztély Ulrich, proposals for the New York Life Building in Budapest, 1891: a) first and b) second version (reprod. from: *Ország-Világ* 13 [1891], 622, and *MMÉEK* 27 [1893], pl. XVIII)

[20.] Keresztély Ulrich (1836–1909) was the other applicant who presented two different variants at the same time. Their ornamentation was designed in a neo-Renaissance style with baroque elements and a strong French influence,56 even though Hungarian historicism was generally more influenced by the German trends.57 The first variant (Fig. 9a) was a simpler one, with no exterior loggias. The second version (Fig. 9b), on the other hand, had a huge triple loggia at the centre of the façade facing the boulevard. The architect also added a loggia to the curved corner and a monumental group of statues on its top.

[21.] Despite the previously mentioned plans, we cannot get a full picture of Alajos Hauszmann's competition design, because there is only one elevation drawing that we know of (Fig. 10). The central part of the main façade had an avant-corps with a pediment and a baroque-inspired cupola on the top. On the corner we can observe a stocky spire with a lantern.

56 József Sisa, ed., *Motherland and Progress: Hungarian Architecture and Design 1800-1900,* Basel 2016, 672.

57 Sisa, ed., *Motherland and Progress: Hungarian Architecture and Design 1800-1900,* 276, 315, 661.


10 Alajos Hauszmann, proposal for the New York Life Building in Budapest, 1891 (reprod. from: *Ország-Világ* 13 [1891], 623)

## The Proposals for the Interior

[22.] The interior drawings that were elaborated, including those of the café, the entrance halls, the main staircase, and the great courtyard, were very detailed. The trapezoidal site would have resulted in a distorted rectangle-shaped courtyard if the architect had created regular wings that were parallel to the edges of the building lot – only two of the contestants decided to pursue this option: Quittner and Pecz. However, more importantly, the main entrance was placed in the middle of the boulevard virtually on every entry plan. Although functionally this would have been well-founded, Quittner provided a separate staircase for company offices instead, a staircase that only lead up to the first-floor. The café occupied the corner[58] and the part that faced the side street, Dohány street, at the ground level – with only one exception: Freund's design. The most interesting element of his entry plan was the design of the coffee-house. Unlike the other applicants, he placed this room in the inner courtyard that would have been a huge space with a glass roof surrounded by three storeys of loggias in a way that resembled a theatre auditorium (Fig. 11a). This kind of interior layout had no precedent in Budapest; only the Somossy Orpheum[59]

58 The corner placement of the café was common in that period in Budapest and Vienna. Some well-known examples include the Café EMKE on the Blaha Lujza square, the Café Centrál near to Ferenciek square in the very heart of the city, the Café Báthory on Calvin square and Café Sztambul in the Margaret Park – all of them were located at busy street intersections.

59 This was a theatre established for vaudevilles, built by the Fellner and Helmer firm in 1894. *Magyar Mérnök és Építész Egylet Közlönye* [Gazette of the Association of Hungarian Engineers and Architects] 28 (1894), 141.

came close to Quittner's design a couple of years later. Contemporary architectural press especially appreciated this concept.60

11 Café interior design proposals for the New York Life Building in Budapest, 1891, by a) Vilmos Freund, and b) Samu Pecz (reprod. from: *MMÉEK* 27 [1893], pl. III and VI)

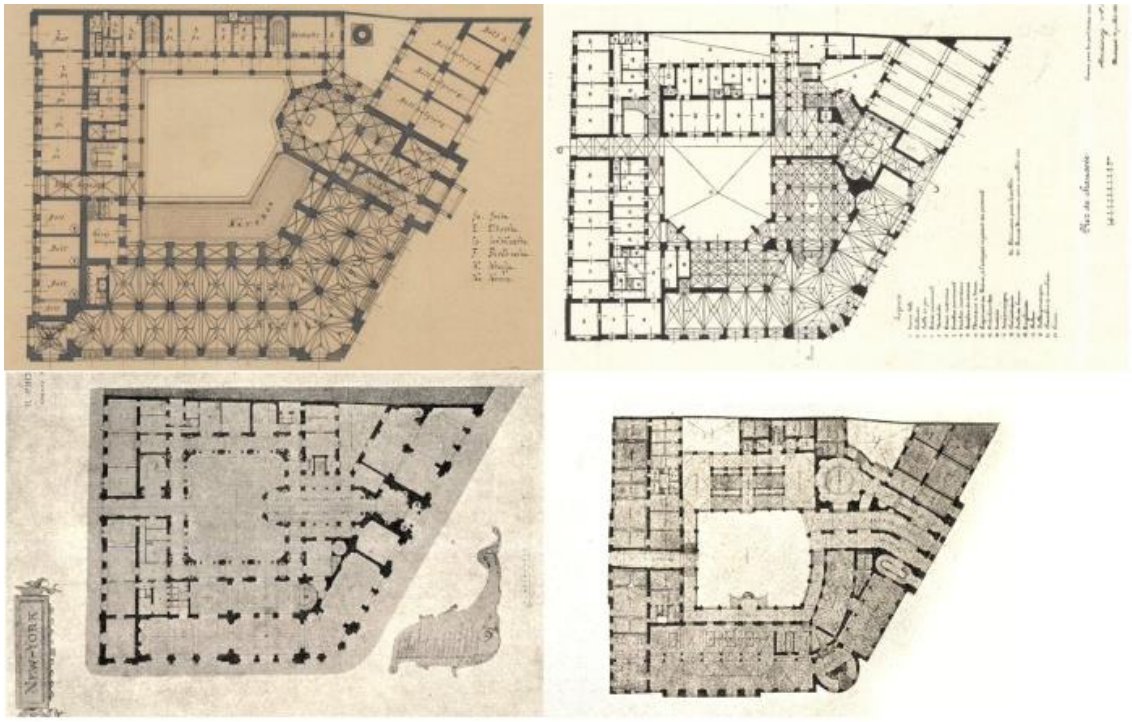
Bukovics's plan stood out for its spacious café, created by replacing the internal load-bearing walls with a skeleton frame structure. His proposal overall was innovative in terms of structure while still rather conservative in terms of style. In contrast to this, other contestants focused on creating an outstanding and unique exterior, with a rather conventional layout; Ulrich's design is a great example of this strategy. Another rather unique solution to the café design was Pecz's: he added a long premise on the courtyard side that would become a conservatory with an iron frame (Fig. 12a). The entire interior was heavily decorated in a gothic-revival style and crowned by lierne vaults (Fig. 11b); these were typical of the late gothic age and were widely used in the nineteenth-century neo-Gothic architecture.61

[23.] The peculiarity of Steinhardt's and Lang's design was the hexagonal layout of the café room on the corner and the addition of a great gallery to it (Fig. 12b). Their floor plan tried to combine the advantages of the regular wings with a rectangular courtyard. Eventually, Ulrich's project for the interior of the New York Life Building café was the most conservative one, as it essentially was an aggregation of smaller rooms with such an outmoded design (Fig. 12c). His elegantly articulated courtyard, however, stood out for its exuberantly decorated row of arches. Bukovics also highlighted the courtyard: he designed one of its sides (the side of the main entrance) to be softly curved (Fig. 12d). This resulted in a long, curved hall that would have united the corner-tower and the circular entrance hall into a single symmetrical composition – creating one of the most original architectural solutions in the entire competition. Another unique feature

60 "The theatre-like solution of Freund's is absolutely unique." *Pesti Hírlap* [Pest Chronicle] vol. 8 (1891), no. 26, p. 5

61 In Hungary, it was the result of Friedrich Schmidt's and Imre Steindl's impact.

of his plan was the impressive main staircase that occupied the entire court-wing.



12 Floorplans for the New York Life Building in Budapest, 1891, by a) Samu Pecz (top left), b) Antal Steinhardt and Adolf Lang (top right), c) Keresztély Ulrich (down left) and d) Gyula Bukovics (down right). (Reprod. from: *MMÉEK* 27 [1893], 98, 265, 393, 398)

[24.] In conclusion, it can be said that the applicants drew inspiration from different historical building styles while synthesising all of the technical innovations of their age. The entry plans showed a wide variety of architectural and engineering solutions as the competing architects experimented with diverse layouts, accents and ornamentation. Bukovics's classicist plan was relatively modest, just like the anonymous submission (Fig. 13) that could even be accused of showing little imagination. Although only its elevation is known of, the design itself is quite mediocre with its rather conventional avant-corps and cupolas.


13 The anonymous proposal for the New York Life Building in Budapest, 1891 (reprod. from: *Ország-Világ* 13 [1891], 627)

Quittner's neo-Baroque design was a little more elaborate, but above all, it stands out for its expedient floor plans. The fourth classical plan in line is the one by Hauszmann that created a calmer atmosphere and an integrated overall effect compared to the other projects. It appeared to be well-balanced but not at all outstanding, as it lacked any remarkable features such as an accent tower. The two most expressive classicizing projects were undoubtedly the submissions by Freund and Ulrich. While Freund did apply neo-Renaissance ornaments to the exterior, its overall appearance – lacking unifying motifs – looked fragmented. Both of Ulrich's projects were heavily decorated and had a tower. Besides the classicizing entries, three purely gothic revival plans had been submitted. Apart from Bobula – whose first version was neo-Gothic (Fig. 6a) – two other candidates chose the gothic period for their inspiration. Pecz's richly decorated plan differs from the architect's oeuvre that overall was a rather moderate reinterpretation of the medieval architectural styles. In this particular case, however, his work was inspired by several styles at the same time – in accordance with the conventions of late historicism, while Steinhardt's and Lang's project featured an overly elaborate exterior.

## The Competition's Outcome

[25.]The selection committee had three members:62 Gyula Berczik (1853–1933), a young clerk-architect from the Ministry of Commerce; Lajos Lechner (1833–1897), a well-known engineer who had won the first prize at the competition for the masterplan of Budapest in 1871; and Imre Steindl (1839–

62 Ferenc Vadas, *Tudományos dokumentáció, New York palota és kávéház* [Documentation of the Building History, New York Palace], Budapest 1995, 42.

1902), the leading architect of the time and designer of the Parliament building in Budapest. In September 1891, after the Hungarian jury had reviewed all of the projects for the New York Life building, these were exhibited at Budapest. By October, the plans were sent to New York for revision, and the company management confirmed the verdict of the Hungarian jury.63 The result was announced officially at the beginning of December 1891:64 Alajos Hauszmann received the first prize and the commission to elaborate the construction plans. Steinhardt's & Lang's entry received the second prize, and Freund's the third.65 Hauszmann started working on the authorization plans immediately. The work had been proceeding well when a scandal concerning the competition unfolded six months later: The protests erupted in the architectural and the general press in summer 1892. An anonymous article claimed that the entire process of the competition was corrupted from the beginning. The authors thought it was the reason why only eight of the invited twelve architects had submitted their proposals. Hauszmann, the winner, was a university professor, just like one of the jury members, Steindl. The allegation was that the two intended to help each other to obtain commissions, so presumably Hauszmann's victory was secured regardless of the quality of his work. Consequently, a series of articles was published66 condemning the winning plan. The critics focused mainly on the different functional inadequacies of the layout. They also pointed out the similarities between Ulrich's and Hauszmann's steeple, accusing one of them of plagiarism. They demanded a thorough investigation with an independent jury in Vienna,67 threatening to sue the New York Life Insurance Company itself.68 Eventually, the debate slowly died out, and construction continued. It is not known exactly what caused the delayed outrage, and it is rather strange that neither the company nor Hauszmann himself responded to the accusations publicly. The scandal is what most likely has lead to the publication of nearly all of the competition designs in *Magyar Mérnök és Építészegylet Közlönye* (*MMÉEK*) [Gazette of the Association of Hungarian Engineers and Architects] in 1893. This series of plans provides a unique insight into the architectural discourse and trends of the era.

63 *Vállalkozók Lapja* [Enterpreneur's Review], vol. 13 (1891), no. 17, p. 2

64 *Vállalkozók Lapja* [Enterpreneur's Review], vol. 13 (1891), no. 51, p. 2

65 The evaluation criteria and the selection process of this competition have not been published. Therefore we can only speculate about the choice of these three entries by the jury.

66 *Építészeti Szemle* [Architectural Review] vol. 6 (1892), no. 30, pp. 34–48.

67 Hungarian architectural professionals of the time considered Vienna to be an impartial judge of Hungarian domestic debates.

68 This threat obviously did not have any legal grounds, as no legislation regarding these competitions existed in Hungary before 1908.

[26.] The competition for the New York Life Palace was apparently scandalous, and this was not unusual for significant architectural contests of the period. It can be argued that the irregularities were conventional, except for the foreign commissions. There were often critical responses to competition announcements where the judgement criteria, the compensation or the programme were not clear enough. Accusations of injust or inaccurate judgement emerged a number of times, and in these cases the winner was frequently attacked.69 In general, sources are rather contradictory on the orderly arrangement of the competition processes. Journals close to the official associations, e.g. the Association of Hungarian Engineers and Architects, mainly publicized the increasing number of contests,70 while dissatisfaction with certain competitions was only expressed in isolated cases.71 The specificity of the New York Life Palace scandal was the foreign identity of the commissioners, which increased the complexity of the proceedings. When the wave of criticism came, the contestants called for an exhibition of the projects so they could be compared publicly. Hauszmann announced not to participate in such an exhibition because – as he claimed – his plans were still in America and he was not willing to display only copies72 next to everyone else's originals. With the limited evidence that we dispose of today, it is not possible to determine whether the selection process was indeed corrupted or the critical responses were due to the frustration of the unsuccessfull applicants.

[27.] The question of the distribution of the mass of the building was very important for this competition. This was also one of the central concerns of the architects of the period in general, who were trying to adapt their designs to the increasing size of buildings. The second important aspect concerned the exterior appearance of the buildings that were expected to be harmoniously inscribed into the urban context and accomodate the shape of the site. As has been demonstrated, the participants provided different answers to these two challenges: some emphasized the main entrance, while others accentuated the corner. The scale of the entry plans does not allow for a detailed iconographic analysis of the decorative motifs. The main difference between the projects is that some of them (like Bukovics's) resembled common apartment houses of the

69 For e.g.: the competition for the new Worker's Clinic in Budapest in 1907, where the author (Gyula Landherr) criticised heavily the judgement process (*Pesti Hírlap* [Pest Chronicle] vol. 8 (1907), no. 17, p. 7.

70 This can be proved by observing the callings for competition in the press of the period, e.g. in *Vállalkozók Lapja* [Enterpreneur's Review] or in *Építészeti Szemle* [Architectural Review]

71 For example: the competitions for the hospital of Szolnok in 1891 (*Vállalkozók Lapja* [Enterpreneur's Review] 13 (1891), no. 49, 3), the theatre of Kecskemét in 1895 (*Vállalkozók Lapja* [Enterpreneur's Review] 15 (1895), no. 34, p. 1)

72 At that time, the only technically available option were – usually poor-quality – photographs.

age, while others (for example Ulrich's) almost gave an impression of official state architecture. Although for this competition the commissioners expected the project to have a distinctive appearance, the building also had to avoid looking like a great public building while it consisted merely of apartments, a challenge that architects of the era were well aware of. The approach of the contestants and the requirements of the company must have met at some point where these contradictory aspects balanced.

[28.] The general public was not aware of the ongoing competition-scandal. The issue did not go beyond the circles of the architectural profession. What generated the public interest, however, was the completion of the palace itself, and even more so the opening of the café on the ground floor. The reception of the final result was highly positive.73 The richly-decorated exterior was pointed out for having the potential of both pleasing the citizens of Budapest and attracting foreign and domestic visitors.74 Moreover, the critics agreed that the New York Life Palace's café was the most lavish one of the kind in the entire city. Certain reviews also provided a detailed account of the works of art placed in the newly named Café New York.75

## Alajos Hauszmann's Executed Project

[29.] After winning the commission, Hauszmann modified his plans significantly. He was assisted by two junior architects, Kálmán Giergl (1863–1954) and Floris Korb (1860–1930), who worked at his office during the 1890s.76 Hauszmann made the façades more ornate while leaving the number of axes untouched. The main change was the addition of a spectacular tower in the central part of the boulevard-façade (Fig. 14). Initially, his entry did not feature any towers; the company insisted on building one.77 The positionning and the appearance of this tower were rather reminiscent of the one from Ulrich's competition plan, a resemblance which might have been unintended and accidental. The final version of the exterior was rather expressive, and reminded the Berlin-style architecture

73 Cf. "The Palace of the New York Life Company", in: *Budapesti Hírlap* [Budapest Chronicle] vol. 14 (1894), p. 1.

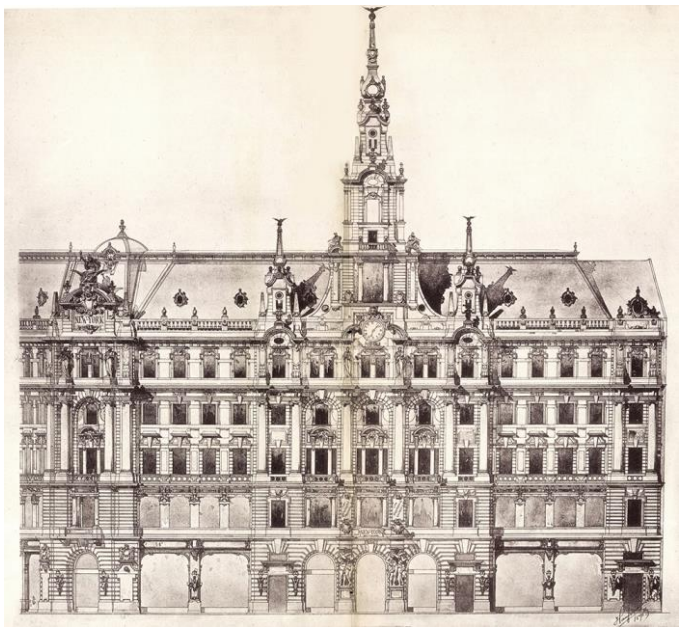
74 Cf. "The New York Palace and Coffee House", in: *Vasárnapi Újság* [Sunday Journal] vol. 41 (1894), no. 44, p. 764.

75 Cf. "The Café 'New York'", in: *Építő Ipar* [Building Industry] 18 (1894), no. 44, 519.

76 Hauszmann first recommended Korb and Giergl in the article that he published about the New York Life Palace: Alajos Hauszmann, "The Palace of the New-York Life Insurance Company in Budapest", in: *Magyar Mérnök és Építész Egylet Közlönye* [Gazette of the Association of Hungarian Engineers and Architects] 26 (1892), 321. Both of them became well-known architects, co-designing the Academy of Music in Budapest built in 1907.

77 "There was no steeple on the competition plan; we added it because of the company's expressed desire to do so." Hauszmann, "The Palace of the New-York Life Insurance Company in Budapest", 321.

of the late nineteenth century.78 The connection to the architecture of Munich of the period becomes apparent, when we compare examples from Budapest and the Bavarian capital such as the Bernheimer Palais (Fig. 15).79 The central steeple became the key element of the building accentuating the vertical axis just like the New York Life Palace on the *Grand Boulevard* in Budapest (Fig. 16).



14 Alajos Hauszmann, New York Life Palace in Budapest, elevation, 1892 (reprod. from: *MMÉEK* 26 [1892], pl. XIV)

78 Gábor György Papp, *Von Berlin nach Budapest – Aspekte des Historismus in der ungarischen Architektur,* Potsdam 2007, 101.

79 Dieter Klein, *Münchner Maßstäbe: der Siegeszug der Münchner Architektur im 19. Jahrhundert,* Munich 2008, 104. Hauszmann later became acquainted with Bernheimer's firm (Klein, *Münchner Maßstäbe*, 106), but the planning of the New York Life Palace was already completed by then, so there is no direct connection between the two buildings. The similarity may have come from the similar circumstances of the era regarding the realisation of any urban project.

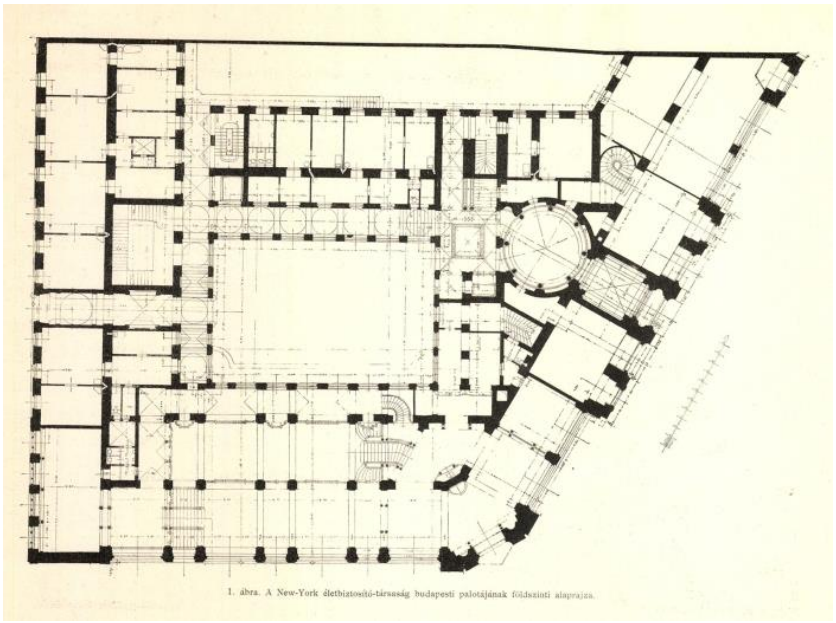
15 Friedrich Thiersch and Martin Dülfer, Bernheimer Palais, Munich, 1889 (photograph: Wikimedia Commons)

16 Elizabeth Boulevard, Budapest, circa 1900 (photograph: http://www.antikterkep.hu/images/erzskorut1920.jpg)

[30.] If we take a look at the company's other buildings in Europe, it becomes apparent that their request to incorporate a steeple – possibly with a clock – was no coincidence. Another recurring feature is the corner, with several of the proposed plans including an architectural element that would make the building stand out. In the late nineteenth century, corner-cupolas were common, but in this case, Hauszmann ultimately decided not to add one to the design, but only a group of statues above a monumental "New York" sign.

[31.] The distribution of spaces within the palace was also typical of its period. As apartment houses were the most common type of buildings at that time, the New York Life Palace was not an exception. Architects had to spare as many

square-metres for rent as possible. This usually meant premises with apartments on the upper floors. The café on the ground floor (Fig. 17) occupied such an amount of space that only a small area remained for shops. For pragmatic reasons, in most cases the gateways were as narrow as they could possibly be and only the genuinely representative houses differed in this regard.



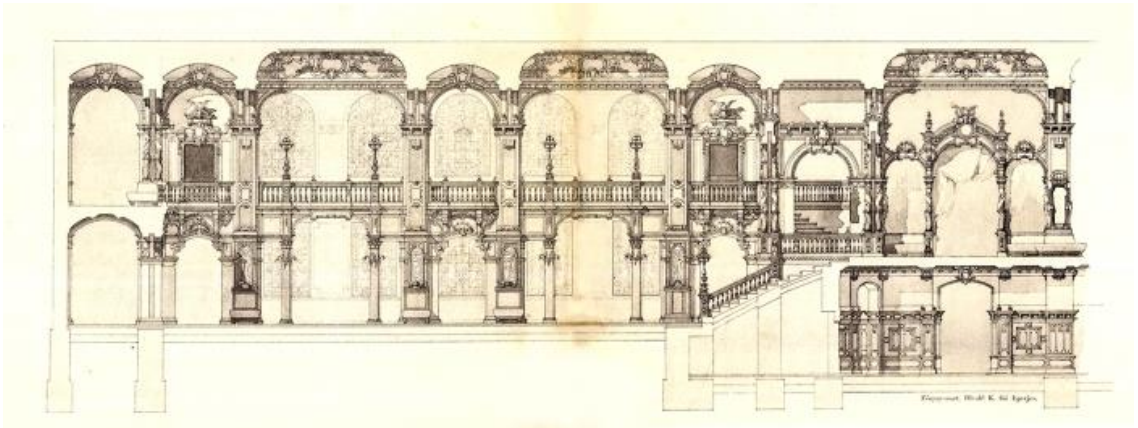

17 Alajos Hauszmann, New York Life Palace in Budapest, floorplan, 1892 (reprod. from: *MMÉEK* 26 [1892], 322)

The New York Life Palace had an elegant, spacious gateway leading into a circular hall surrounded by columns. This hall was designed to accomodate the acute angle between the two wings of the building. Therefore, the rectangular courtyard could not be parallel with the main façade where the entrance opened. The main staircase also started from this circular hall. The insurance company occupied the area of the first floor that faced the boulevard, and right above it was a reading club residing over the offices. The upper floors were strictly residential: there were in total thirty-two apartments with ensuite bathrooms (which was quite uncommon at that time). The building was also equipped with the newest technological inventions, such as hydraulic elevators, central heating and electric lighting, that were considered to be a luxury at the time.

[32.] The most remarkable part of the interior was certainly the café at the street level.80 The appearance of this space contributed to the originality of the architectural program – a commercial building that also opens its doors to the citizens. New York Life insisted on having a luxurious café in the building that would be an attraction to the public on its own. Of those competition entries that included elevation drawings, we can imagine how this interior would have looked.

80 Sisa and Wiebenson, eds., *The Architecture of Historic Hungary*, 222.

In each project, the café design resonated with the appearance of the exterior. Every one of the participating architects except Freund placed the café in the side street-annex, with the café's entrance in the corner. Hauszmann proposed a line of heavily decorated neo-Baroque rooms (Fig. 18). The realised café had three different floors: the actual ground floor, the mezzanine and the basement – all this for theatrical impact.81 Staircases and galleries connected these three levels in one dynamic composition. The walls, the pillars and the vaults were richly decorated with gilded stuccos. The pavement was made of colourful marble. There were figural frescos without any specific iconography on the ceiling painted by Gusztav Mannheimer (1859–1937) and Ferenc Eisenhut (1857–1903). Much of the furnishings were made from bronze that became one of the dominant colours of the interior.



18 Alajos Hauszmann, elevation drawing of the café in the New York Life Palace in Budapest, 1892 (reprod. after *MMÉEK* 26 [1892], pl. XVI)

[33.] The cornerstone of the palace was laid on May 12, 1892. By the summer of 1894, construction work was more or less finished, the edifice gaining its occupancy permit in October 1894. The inauguration ceremony followed shortly after. The palace can be described as late-historicist – it combines elements of different historical building styles.82 – This style had already reached its peak level by the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century; the first non-historicist major public building in Budapest, the Museum of Applied Arts, was inaugurated in 1896.. –Hauszmann's adherence to the neo-Baroque style was probably influenced by his former work. When he produced the plans for the Royal Palace in Buda in 1891-1905, he was close to the government of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and had to adapt to the official style of the Habsburg imperial and royal court; this kind of neo-Baroque architecture was mainly inspired by Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach's oeuvre. HauszmannHauszmann

81 No comparable cases can be found/pointed out in Budapest in the 1890s.

82 Hauszmann

## Epilogue

[34.] The significance of this palace goes beyond its architectural form. Knowledge about the way the competition was carried out as well as the debate that followed, allows us to picture more precisely the kind of architectural ideas that the leading Hungarian designers in the early 1890s expressed when a rare occasion presented itself: an international investment in the city of Budapest. Studying the submissions, we can get closer to an understanding of the architects' planning methods, and can compare opposing views on architecture.83 For example, we can see that Zsigmond Quittner's plan is very similar to the 1887 Equitable Life Building in Berlin. A major similarity is the corner placement of the dome, surrounded by two small pediments on each side. As towers and cupolas were a typical feature of the late-nineteenth century, it is interesting to note that in this case, they were not simply conspicuous/remarkable architectural features, but an advertisement strategy. It may therefore be argued that these buildings fulfilled the function that skyscrapers had in the United States: While in the United States, around 1890, fifteen-storey buildings were widespread, in Europe, skyscrapers were prohibited in most cities, and buildings did not exceed four or five floors.84 These company buildings are an indicator of the beginning of the global age, as they were once built by foreign enterprises.

[35.] After World War I, in 1918, the New York Life Insurance Company sold the palace to Hungarian owners. The café, though, retained its name – New York – and its reputation, and the palace became quite famous as a cultural meeting point for all kinds of creative professionals, especially writers and poets.85 Several of the progressive artistic organisations, and editors of the most modernist literary journals gathered here up until World War II. Fortunately, the palace did not suffer any significant damages, the café survived, and parts of the exterior were restored. After the communist government came to power, bearing a name of an 'imperialist' western city was disapproved of, the New York Life sign disappeared, and the café was renamed: Hungária Café and Restaurant. After the fall of communism, the restaurant was closed and the palace fell into

83 Since we do not know of the specific evaluation criteria that the competing projects have been subjected to by the jury, it is not possible to establish whether the selection was made based on functional or stylistic considerations with absolute certainty. Therefore, we cannot ascertain the qualities of Hausmann's design that have led to his victory.

84 There were some exceptions, e.g. Warsaw, where the maximum height had been set to seven floors after 1905.

85 Such as Ferenc Molnár, Endre Ady or Mihály Babits; Mario D. Fenyo, "Writers in Politics: The Role of Nyugat in Hungary, 1908–1919", in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (1976), no. 1, 185–198.

decay; it was covered by scaffolding for many years to protect pedestrians from falling masonry.

19 New York Life Palace, Budapest, 2008 (author's photograph)

20 Interior of the Café New York, Budapest, 2016 (author's photograph)

[36.] Eventually, in 2001, a foreign company stepped in: the Boscolo Hotel Groups86 purchased the building. They decided on a full-scale renovation of the exterior (Fig. 19) and of the café (Fig. 20). Renovation work took place from 2002 to 2006, restoring the palace to its former glory – with a New York Life sign and bronze eagles on the top of the stone obelisks. Today, the building is one of

86 An Italian five-star hotel chain, founded in 1978.

the most appreciated palaces of the city – together with the two other foreign insurance company buildings: the Foncière and the Gresham Palaces.

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