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The National Casino: Its history, library, members and future

The cultural heritage

Recently, cultural heritage has gradually become a key concept of Western European cultural policy and has become a part of our daily lives. The concept has been the subject of scholarly debates since the early 1980s. Slightly late in Hungary, it assumed a similar role in political dialogues just as in Western Europe with the establishment of the Ministry of National Cultural Heritage (1998). Conferences were already organized around the concept of heritage in the early 2000s.¹

The national interpretation of the concept of heritage started with the French Revolution, while the concept itself was coined by Édouard Pommier in 1790.²

Until the 1960s cultural heritage was limited to historical monuments, and the judgement passed (ie. whether a building is part of our cultural heritage or not) was based on the age of the monument. Then the concept expanded to encompass architectural heritage, and in the 1970s cultural heritage started to be explained in terms of collective memory, which also increased the number of conservation groups.

In France, the 1979 Law on Archives mentioned the word „heritage” for the first time. The concept was specified by the Council of Europe in a Congress of 1985, but the concept of a common European heritage had already been defined in 1949. In 1994, the Congress of European Local and Regional Activities laid down the principles of defining and preserving local and regional cultural heritage.³ Thanks to the aforementioned, and especially the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, cultural heritage has become an organizing principle for communities all over the world, from the smallest rural villages to humanity as a whole, and seems legit to represent the identity of these communities.

Cultural heritage is a collection of objects (or intangible objects expressed by objects) of importance to the community.⁴ The objects are collected, explored, preserved and made available to the community by designated institutions. In this way, objects are expanded by the processor’s interpretation, become one with memory, and heritage and memory must be interpreted together. Both concepts are part of identity and must be sought, preserved and rediscovered.

¹ Gábor Sonkoly, „A kulturális örökség fogalmának értelmezései és alkalmazási szintjei”, *Regio* 11, 4. sz. (2000): 45–66, 45.

² Uo., 46; Péter Erdősi and Gábor Sonkoly, „A kultúra melankóliája: A kulturális örökség fogalmának megjelenése”, *Valóság*, (2005/6): 73–90, 74.

³ Erdősi and Sonkoly, „A kultúra melankóliája...”, 75.

⁴ Sonkoly, „A kulturális örökség...”, 46–47.

The two concepts are linked to a third one, to the concept of history, but heritage is not the same as the past or history. Only a selected and interpreted part of the past can become part of history. Heritage, however, is the result of the transformation of a memorable past.⁵ Cultural heritage can be realized on many levels, including local, regional, national and supranational. At different levels, heritage is realized and understood differently. On a national level, cultural heritage means national heritage. You need to determine what makes an object worthy of being taken on by a larger community.

One such local or national cultural heritage is the National Casino (NC). The Casino is a local heritage of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, but is also an outstanding national heritage for our country.

Therefore, the exploration of the history and significance of the National Casino cannot be delayed further. Archival materials are incomplete, but they still fill the gaps in the timeline that emerges from existing literature.

Over the past decade, there has been increasing research into the history of nation-building, forms of national consciousness. Hungarian research, however, is characterized by a duality: on the one hand, no (or little) basic research has been done into the topic; on the other, the reception of European and global theory has begun. Following these patterns, a series of theoretical studies have yielded results.

The nearly 200-year-old Hungarian Academy of Sciences Library and Information Centre is an outstanding centre and a source of scientific life in Hungary. Its range of tasks and tools continues to expand even today, changing in line with the challenges of our times. Besides the collecting, systematizing and making available the most recent knowledge, the processing and digital reconstruction of the museum-specific parts of cultural and historical heritage is continuous. One of the most noteworthy collections in this institution is the library of the National Casino, which was disbanded in the last century.

István Széchenyi and the National Casino

Hungarian people have a very rugged history. This past has served as a motivation for everybody who wanted to change the fate of Hungary. In this aspect there was a very important period of our history when the changes started. It was the Hungarian Reform Era (19th-century) and one of the most determinative personalities was Count István Széchenyi. He represented the awakening of the Hungarian national identity and introduced a lot of important reforms, which led to progress.

At the beginning of the 19th century, German was the language of urban dwellers, and the Hungarian language was mainly used in country houses in the villages, which meant that the different social classes lived in isolation. István Széchenyi tried to remedy this situation when he spoke in favor of the Hungarian language at the Diet in 1825-27, at the session of 3 November, 1825. This was the period when Pest started to develop (overtaking Bratislava), Széchenyi recognized this, and his main reform ideas originated from this period. He planned to develop the capital and the whole country. The population of Pest grew, and public life, politics and culture began to develop.

⁵ Erdősi and Sonkoly, „A kultúra melankóliája...”, 79–80.

One of his great achievements was the foundation of the National Casino Association in 1827. Its original name was Casino of Pest till 1830. During its nearly 120 years of existence, it was an integral part of Hungarian public life and culture. The National Casino established its own library to serve its members. Books were collected from various disciplines and countries. The methodically collected and systematically arranged library exceeded the country's public libraries both in quality and quantity.

Széchenyi's visions were to create a civil society in Budapest, modernize Hungary, support economic modernization, and consolidate Hungarian as an official language instead of Latin. Széchenyi's reforms spread to many areas of life, he organized railroads, public horse races, Danube steamboats, and the first permanent bridge linking Buda and Pest (Chain Bridge)⁶. He also supported cultural initiatives. His momentous decision to donate one year's income in order to contribute to the establishment of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1825) traditionally marks the beginning of the Reform Era. We consider him as "the greatest Hungarian" for his actions, views and achievements. Széchenyi was concerned about the future of Hungary and he had a fear of the impending death of the nation.

He studied club life during his stay abroad and he considered to set up a constantly running casino (not just during the parliamentary term), which would serve as a public forum for the Hungarian nobility. The opening ceremony of the National Casino (Figure 1.⁷) took place on 20 August 1827.⁸ Széchenyi's aimed to construct a distinctive, ornate public building in our country, where the prominent and better educated, intelligent men, from every class of society can meet each other for a conversation or can read a variety of political newspapers and useful economic, scientific and artistic monthly writings. In this place they can have fun in their leisure time and can also dine in a restaurant.⁹ With the foundation of the Casino he inspired a nationwide trend for the liberal Hungarian nobility to create a civil society, to establish casinos in the countryside, in the big cities across the country and also in Transylvania. The Habsburgs watched this movement very carefully, since casinos started to play a central role in Hungarian public life during the Reform Era. Most of the casinos served the purposes of gathering and socializing for nobles and commoners.

Around 1831 the casinos multiplied spectacularly. In 1833 the literature already mentioned 24 Hungarian, 25 Transylvanian and some other casinos.¹⁰ The urge to establish casinos reached its climax around 1837/1838. In 1837 10 new casinos were



1. Figure
The building of the National Casino

⁶ Mihály Ilk, *A Nemzeti Casino százéves története: 1827–1926* (Budapest: Franklin, 1927), 4.

⁷ The source of the picture: <http://ybl.bparchiv.hu/osszkep-kossuth-lajos-utcabol> (accessed 10. 09. 2019)

⁸ Zoltán Simon, „A reformkori magyar politikai nyilvánosság és a Nemzeti Kaszinó”, *Sic Itur Ad Astra* 12, 3. sz. (2000): 11–46, 22.

⁹ Ilk, *A Nemzeti Casino...*, 8–9.

¹⁰ Simon, „A reformkori magyar...”, 23–24.

created in the countryside. The second half of the 1840s saw the number of casinos stagnate.¹¹

At the beginning, the association had 175 shareholders, and a committee was set up to lay the foundations and deal with the affairs of the association. Through members and purchases, the building of the Casino was furnished and supplied with silverware, glasses and other things. From different parts of the country, wines of the best quality came to NC's cellar to be sold. The Casino wanted to increase the reputation and commercial turnover of Hungarian wines abroad too.¹²

The Casino had restaurant workers, a court master, a gatekeeper, two male servants, and a heater. 18 different domestic and foreign papers and journals were ordered. Every Sunday, in the salon of the NC, music and games were played, this was remarkable because the musical life of Pest began to develop only in 1833.¹³

The National Casino soon became an unofficial parliament, where the Hungarian elites could discuss current issues. However, politics were banned. The Board of Directors of the Casino were consistently against any political activity. This is also proved by the case of Lajos Kossuth, who asked to be admitted to the association in 1836, he wanted to use its newspapers and beautiful library. Széchenyi personally asked the new candidate to withdraw his application, fearing that the Vienna court would consider it a political move. Kossuth retired.

According to a confidential warning from 1832, the casino is considered a thorn in the flesh in Vienna, being the center of liberalism and Hungarians.¹⁴

The founders wanted only a place to make class divisions between nobles and the bourgeois elite disappear, where they can meet and smoke and read together conveniently, without restraint. The casino attracted members from the most prominent Hungarian families. It was opened to worthy strangers as well. The National Casino turned into the most fashionable club in this era. (Figure 2.¹⁵)

From 1835, the members were obliged to sign a declaration of testament. The text was drafted by Széchenyi, and it declared that the members have to mention the National Casino in their wills and leave it a small amount. Many people signed the declaration on the premises, and their names were read out at the general meetings year after year.



2. Figure The hall of the Casino

¹¹ Simon, A reformkori magyar..., 26.

¹² Ilk, A Nemzeti Casino..., 10.

¹³ Ilk, A Nemzeti Casino..., 17.

¹⁴ József Bölönyi, „A nemzeti kaszinóról”, *História* (1994/ 9–10): 19–21, 19.

¹⁵ The source of the picture, <http://ybl.bparchiv.hu/nemzeti-kaszino-nagyterme-0> (accessed 10.09.2019)

In 1848, Széchenyi chaired the general assembly, where the members saw him at the headquarters for the last time, though in 1856, he sent an ornate chess game from the Döbling sanatorium.¹⁶ István Széchenyi shot himself on 8 April 1860.

In his testament, István Széchenyi bequeathed a golden cup to the Casino, and requested to organize the shareholder's dinner each year, where the members were supposed to empty the cup to his honor which was filled with the best of the wines at that time.

A few years after his death, the golden goblet was delivered to the Casino by the inheritors. In 1861, the General Assembly resolved to hold a feast every year in memory of Széchenyi, where the speaker holds the cup in his hand. This was the Széchenyi feast, held every year during the operation of the association (with the exception of the war years).¹⁷

The first such feast was held on 4 February 1864, with a memorial speech by Baron Béla Wenckheim. Commemorative speeches were published in the Casino Yearbook in 1901, then published year after year in the Yearbook. The Széchenyi memorial speeches from 1864 to 1944 were held 50 times by aristocrats and 29 times by non-aristocrats.¹⁸

The Casino helped domestic charities and cultural institutions, and organized a number of humanitarian gatherings. In 1922 the Széchenyi Fund was established and 250 million crowns were collected in 5 years.¹⁹

Fundamental Rules²⁰

Each year, the National Casino has issued its current statutes, policies and the names of its members.²¹ According to the articles, the Casino is a forum where well-behaved people can converse pleasantly with each other.²² Their main topics of discussion are science, economics and commerce, books and newspapers, but gambling is excluded.

The National Casino was not an exclusive club. The members of the Casino included historical names, officials, magistrates, lawyers, doctors, scientists, writers, merchants, pharmacists.²³ However, most of the members were from an aristocratic family, not only they formed the association. In the 20th century, non-aristocratic people were also present at a higher percentage among the newcomers, especially since almost all of the noble families had already been represented.

At the beginning one could become a member on condition of simply paying the membership fee. A membership was optional for any Hungarian or Transylvanian men or foreign people - soldiers, scientists, artists, hopeful young men - but

¹⁶ Ilk, *A Nemzeti Casino...*, 31–32.

¹⁷ Ilk, *A Nemzeti Casino...*, 39–40.

¹⁸ Bölönyi, *A nemzeti casinóról...*, 20.

¹⁹ Ilk, *A Nemzeti Casino...*, 43.

²⁰ This chapter based on: *A pesti casino tagjainak a.b.c. szerint való feljegyzése és annak alapjai*, 1828 (Pest: Trattner), 1828; *A nemzeti casino alapszabályai*, 1895 (Budapest: Franklin, 1895), and *A nemzeti casino alapszabályai és házirendje*: 1923 (Budapest, Pallas, 1923).

²¹ All of the Yearbooks are online available in the REAL repository of the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: http://real-j.mtak.hu/view/journal/A_Nemzeti_Casino_=E9vk=F6nyve.html (accessed 10. 09. 2019)

²² *A pesti casino tagjainak...*, 33.

²³ Ilk, *A Nemzeti Casino...*, 11.

they could only register in the book of Strangers, and were allowed to enter the club premises if they had been recommended by another member. The association was created making use of its members' investments, so the first signers became shareholders of the company, so they could visit the Casino for free until the end of their lives.²⁴

Over the years, the rules changed, they got stricter. After a while, it was necessary to recruit new members. If the membership expired, it could be renewed, it could be taken, or it could last a lifetime by the member paying a certain amount.

Initially, the Annual General Meeting was held twice a year, at the beginning and in the middle of the year. After the first few years it was always on the last Sunday in January. On these occasions the regulations required to elect the Chairman of the General Assembly, the members of the Board of Directors and the members of the Council. The General Assembly also had the task of presenting status reports, approvals, approving the cost appropriation or discussion of motions for development, acquisitions, and changing of the statutes. In urgent cases, the assembly could convene an extraordinary general assembly. The General Assembly made decisions by majority rule.

The task of the Council was to administer the Casino, to appoint and dismiss staff, determine the amount of money paid to the staff, to manage current affairs, check the payment of membership fees, create and modify policies, discuss the recruitment of new members.

The Board of Directors consisted of 3 members and carried out executive tasks. It worked out the budget for the next year, represented the assembly, implemented the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Council. The cashier managed the Casino's assets under the supervision of the Directors and the Council. According to the election order, even in the early years, out of 24 members of the committee one third of the members of the council were replaced by new members each year. One member from the Board of Directors resigned each year and a new one was elected for 3 years.

Strict rules governed the operation of the Casino, concerning especially membership fees and card games, e.g. if somebody didn't repay the debts of the game within the given deadline, they could be excluded from the association.

Casino facilities such as the lounge, reading room, game room and restaurant were only used for designated purposes. The library's documents - books, journals, newspapers, maps, other forms - could only be used locally, in the reading and game room, it was forbidden to dine in the reading room and everyone was supposed to stay silent. Outside the restaurant, food was served solely after 10 pm. The rooms were open from 11 a.m. to 5 a.m. the next morning.

The Council also set up several committees for supervising the various tasks: a financial committee (7 members), a game committee (9 members), an art committee (7 members) and a library committee (17 members).

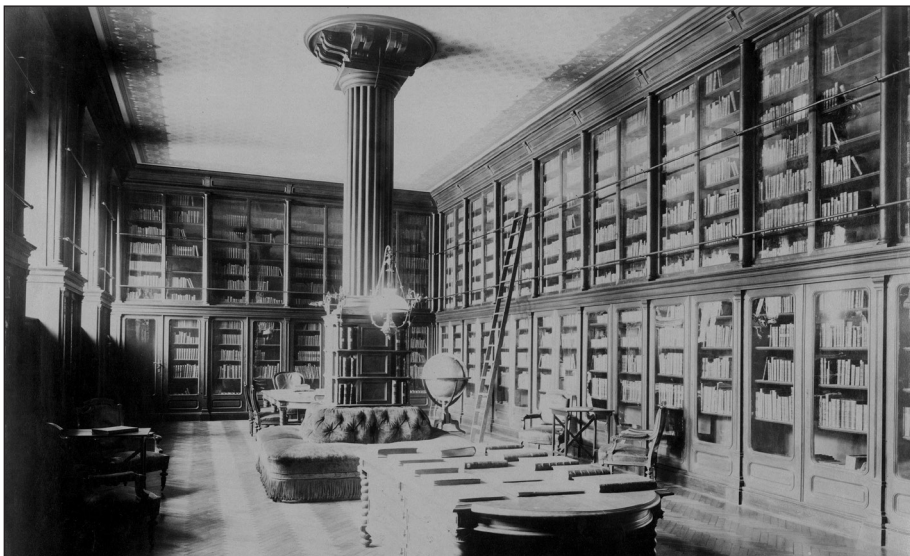
The assets of the National Casino were indivisible: neither shareholders nor members of the association, nor their heirs, could hold any rights. If the dissolution of the club is unavoidable, for unforeseen extraordinary causes or events, all of its assets, as an indivisible foundation, should devolve to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences or to a Hungarian scientific institute of similar nature.²⁵

²⁴ Simon, „A reformkori magyar...”, 19.

²⁵ A nemzeti casino alapszabályai: 1895..., 24.

In cases where the Casino overrode its purpose set out in the statutes and did not comply with its procedures, exceeded its powers, acted as antagonist, committed a serious offense against public security and public order or threatened the interests of the members, the Minister of the Interior could order an investigation, its operation could be suspended and it could be permanently dissolved.²⁶

The Library of the Casino



3. Figure *The library of the Casino*

When Széchenyi established the Casino in 1827, he offered his own collection to the library of the association (Figure 3.²⁷). His donation contained 338 books, and the members of the Casino collected 250 volumes more at the start. Seven years later, in 1834 the library owned 3000 volumes already. Most of the works were written in foreign languages.²⁸ In the next decades the library acquired more and more Hungarian works. The Casino helped spread Hungarian literature in the countryside.

The library wasn't open for the public, only the members could use it and only locally. The collection contained books, newspapers, journals, magazines, maps and other printed matters. Most of the members donated books for the library. The main donors of the library were Count Aurél Dessewffy, Antal Tasner, Ignác Láng, Bernát F. Weisz, Ferenc Szilágyi, János Török.

The Library Committee ordered regular registration of the library from 1838 and set out the principles for growth and maintenance in 1840.

²⁶ A nemzeti casino alapszabályai és házirendje: 1923..., 12.

²⁷ The source of the picture: <http://ybl.bparchiv.hu/nemzeti-kaszino-konyvtara> (accessed 10. 09. 2019).

²⁸ Simon, „A reformkori magyar...”, 42.

In the National Casino, the library consisted of one big hall, three rooms and one reading room (Figure 4.²⁹). The books were in the hall, the journals and newspapers were in the rooms. Several library catalogues facilitated its use:

- an alphabetical card catalogue (1873)
- a topic-based card catalogue (1873)
- an index in which books and new purchases werelisted in alphabetical order
- and a printed catalogue (1852)³⁰.

In 1834 the librarian, Mihály Antal created the first inventory list with 673 works, nearly 3,000 volumes of books, newspapers and periodicals.³¹ The dedicated librarians paid careful attention to the library, kept it and managed it, they tried to meet the needs of library science and bibliography and the institute's traditions alike. There was an official librarian that systematically arranged, maintained the collection and documented the events. Albert



4. Figure The reading room

Pákh published the catalogue of the collection in 1852, László Szalay carried out the organization of the library, Lőrinc Tóth made proposals for the organization of the library. Ferenc Toldy provided the opportunity for professional development and published a study about the library in the „Új Magyar Múzeum” in 1850, while Ferdinand Barna applied the system of the Royal State Library of Munich to the collection. György Urházy was the last regular librarian. From the 1880s on, there was no separate librarian, but the duties of the secretary, the cashier, and the librarian were carried out by one person. At that time the library consisted of 19.000 volumes.³²

The library used the Munich bibliographic and library classification model. The books were classified in 10 different fields, and in these fields the Hungarian, the Hungary-related and the foreign-language works were grouped separately. The classification system of the library was the following in 1852³³:

- I. History of Literature, Mavens (Art Critic), Linguistics, Bibliography, Dictionaries, Encyclopedias
- II. Classics, Literature, Art, Antiques
- III. Philosophy, Education, Schooling, Religion, Church, Mythology
- IV. History, Life Writing, Memorials, Diploma Lore, Coin Lore, Coat of Arms Lore, Genealogy

²⁹ The source of the picture: <http://ybl.bparchiv.hu/nemzeti-kaszino-olvasoszobaja-0> (accessed 10. 09. 2019)

³⁰ János Csontos, „Emlékirat a Nemzeti Casino könyvtáráról”, *Magyar Könyvszemle* 12 (1887): 117–130, 124.

³¹ Aladár György, *Magyarország köz- és magánkönyvtárai 1885-ben* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1886), 68.

³² Csontos, „Emlékirat a Nemzeti...”, 119.

³³ Albert Pákh, *Kalauz a' Nemzeti Casino könyvtárához* (Pest: Trattner, 1852), 259–313.

- V. Geography, Statistics, Travel, Place Drawings, Folk Description, Guides
- VI. Politics, State Science, Public Life, Society, Law and Legal Science, Criminal Law
- VII. National Economy, Finance, Industry, Commerce, Transport
- VIII. Natural Sciences, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Agriculture, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Forestry, Hunting, Horticulture
- IX. Mathematics, Astronomy, Architecture, Handicrafts, Military Science
- X. Mixed

The collection contained a large number of books classified as Hungarian literature, Hungarian history, Hungarian scientific literature, most of Hungarian music, and all publications of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Kisfaludy Society. It was considered the oldest and most prestigious library in the country in the 1880s.³⁴

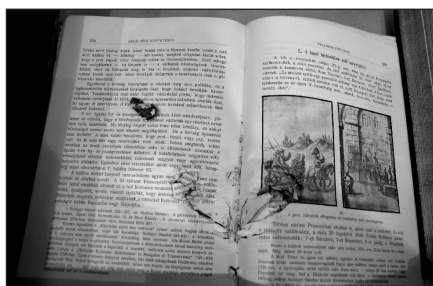
The number of literary works was relatively limited in the library. There were no rarities among them, but there were high-quality works that were not available to everybody because of their high value. A speciality was, for example, the Basle edition of Calepinus's Dictionary from 1605.³⁵ In 1884, 1800 members used the library locally, they read 3210 volumes. The collection contained 13 manuscripts, two old Hungarian documents before 1711, 400 maps, 1 globe and an old painting.³⁶

At the proposal of the Library Committee, the National Casino's Board of Directors ordered the restoration and furnishing of the library from the 1886 budget. Also in the summer of this year, the hall was made higher, the ceiling and the floor were replaced, the windows were restored, all four walls were furnished with new ornate furnishings. As a result of the renovations, it became the most decorative and most impressive salon library of the capital, it got wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling, semi-glazed lockable doors, and open shelves.³⁷

From a historical point of view terrible disasters hit the country and the nation which affected the association as well: firstly the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 and the ensuing Hungarian War of Independence, later the First World War and the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, and finally the Second World War. In these terrible and difficult periods the National Casino was working continuously. After the historical disasters it stood up again and again. Support was given to his members.



5. Figure A damaged book



6. Figure A damaged book with bullet

³⁴ György, Magyarország köz- és magánkönyvtárai..., 69.

³⁵ Ilk, A Nemzeti Casino..., 26–27.

³⁶ György, Magyarország köz- és magánkönyvtárai..., 70.

³⁷ Csontos, „Emlékirat a Nemzeti...”, 129–130.

The library of the National Casino had nearly 40.000 books before the Second World War. The leaders and the members tried to protect the property of the association, when they sensed danger, but after the War they were unable to recover the collection. (Figure 5-6.³⁸)

The end of the Casino

The Minister of Interior of Hungary dissolved the National Casino with a decree in the year 1945, because it proved to be a legal person contrary to the interests of the state.³⁹ According to the association's statutes, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences inherited all assets of the Casino in case of dissolution.

Subsequently, the capital began inventing and seizing the assets of the National Casino. As soon as the Academy became aware of what was happening, they announced their claim to their legacy and signaled their cooperation and support during the salvage. It happened in October 1945 when in the National Casino headquarters the representative of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences acting met the capital's representative.

At this time, the National Casino owned the following items:⁴⁰

- two buildings that were subjected to serious bomb attacks in the war;
- movable objects (the members of the Casino tried to rescue these to the countryside before the war, but unfortunately most of them were destroyed);
- some hunting trophies (the Academy gave these to the Natural History Museum as an eternal deposit);
- the catalogues and indexes of the Casino (we have never seen them anymore).

All the documentation of the association and the library was destroyed. The library was in one of the bombed buildings, on the second floor⁴¹ (Figure 7).⁴² 20–23.000 books were immediately transferred to the Library of the University (October 1945), which were later transported to the building of the Academy (June 1947). The rest 6–10.000 books stayed in the bombed building for more than half a year and were then transported to the building of the Academy (May 1946). The more valuable books were hidden before the war in the cellar of the Parliament, where the enemy soldiers burned them.

7. Figure *The building in the end*



³⁸ Pictures from the books are the author's own recordings.

³⁹ Ügyészi jelentés: [manuscript] [Budapest]: MTA KIK Kézirattár és Régi Könyvek Gyűjteménye, 1945, RAL 234/1945.

⁴⁰ Uo.

⁴¹ János Melich and István Nyireő, Jelentés a Nemzeti Casino könyvtárával kapcsolatos dolgokról [manuscript], Budapest, MTA KIK Kézirattár és Régi Könyvek Gyűjteménye, 1946, ad 274/1946.

⁴² The source of the picture: <http://ybl.bparchiv.hu/osszkep-romos-epuletrol-kossuth-lajos-utca-egyik-tulso-hazabol> (accessed 10. 09. 2019).

The numbers of the books differ from each other in the various written sources and documents. Fortunately, there is a detailed account of the events following the dissolution, but unfortunately we have little information about the events of the next decades.

The “bringing home” (ie. to the Academy) of NC’s books that were either at the headquarters or in the University Library failed several times. Finally, in May 1946, the books were transported from the NC headquarters to the street in a few days, then transported by car to the Vörösmarty Room with the help of high school students, construction workers and a couple of officers, and with the help of a construction contractor’s truck. The bookshelves from the ruined building were transported to the Academy’s Vigyázó Room a few weeks later. High school students and other contributors received nearly 262 volumes of academic publications as awards.⁴³

In June 1947, the Academy’s Vörösmarty Room and Vigyázó Room were prepared for the transfer of the NC book stock remaining in the University Library. The University Library’s deputy officers dumped the books into the garage, and the University Press truck transported them to the Academy. On one occasion, the Academy’s deputy officers were driving a University Press truck toward the University, a full-speed bus ran into them and pushed the car ahead of them for a few meters. The transport company reimbursed the damage to the University Press. The officers were slightly injured and the truck was injured. Finally, they reached the end of the work after 14 rounds.⁴⁴

After the dissolution it was noted that the following items were transferred from the library building:⁴⁵

- an alphabetical index to the library, until 1943, in 4 volumes
- the class catalogs of the Casino, in 13 volumes (the catalogs of two classes were missing at this time)
- the book of the names of the Casino and the book of the strangers
- as well as other objects.

We have not found the class catalogs and inventory books yet. Other objects included a globe from the 1830s and seven African and Hungarian trophies. On 1 August 1947, trophies were handed over to the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as an eternal deposit to the Natural History Museum, to protect them from the danger of being ruined.⁴⁶ During this research, we contacted the Natural History Museum, where we were informed that unfortunately, during the 1956 events, fire struck their building, so many works were destroyed. However, during the itemized search, they found five hunting trophies, which are still part of their stock in an undamaged state.

⁴³ Melich and Nyireö, Jelentés a Nemzeti Casino könyvtárával...

⁴⁴ Uo.

⁴⁵ János Nyireö, Pro memoria, [manuscript], Budapest, MTA KIK Kézirattár és Régi Könyvek Gyűjteménye, 1946, K 829: 282/1946.

⁴⁶ János Melich, [Levél az Elnök Urnak], [manuscript], Budapest MTA KIK Kézirattár és Régi Könyvek Gyűjteménye, 1947, RAL 362/1947.

The more precious pieces of furniture were taken to the Prime Minister's Office, some to the English Committee in the Park Club, and some to the Russian headquarters. The items of equipment probably were taken to the restaurant in the headquarters.⁴⁷

The Casino owned a lot of other works (paintings, maps, furniture), but unfortunately there isn't any information about where they are. Some of them were rescued to the countryside, some of them remained in the ruined building, but most of them were probably destroyed.

The members of the Casino⁴⁸

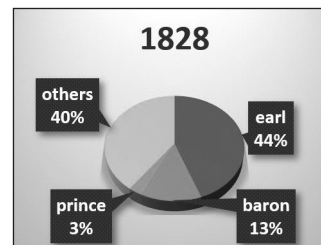
In 1828, the National Casino had 201 members, and before the dissolution of the association, in 1944, it had 529 members. The lowest number was in the years following the Revolution and the War of Independence in 1848. In 1875 (783 members) and in 1923 (791 members) the Casino had the highest numbers of members. The Revolution and the War of Independence had a negative impact on the association and its members. The Trianon border changes did not affect the headcount, but rather the lives and thinking of the members. Perhaps it was this terrible trauma and the sadness of the nation that kept the members together to try and find a solution to the situation together.



8. Figure The numbers of members in the Casino 1828–1944

In 1828 the distribution of the 201 members was as follows:

- earls: 89 members (44 %)
- barons: 26 members (13 %)
- princes: 6 members (3 %)
- others: 80 members (40 %)



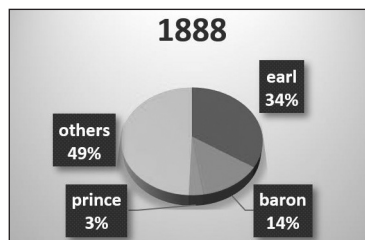
9. Figure Members in 1828

⁴⁷ Ügyészki jelentés: [manuscript]...

⁴⁸ The source of the numbers is the yearbooks of the National Casino.

After 50 years, in 1888 the distribution of the 732 members was as follows:

- earls: 251 members (34 %)
- barons: 98 members (14 %)
- princes: 22 members (3 %)
- others: 361 members (49 %)



10. Figure Members in 1888

For more than a century, the casino defined the life of the Hungarian social elite, and signaled its change in one of the most reliable ways. The social circle did not become a melting pot of society as a whole, but on the contrary: consciously sought to unite the social elite, and to educate and integrate non-aristocratic groups of great importance, thereby ensuring the controlled nature of such integration – pervading the whole era – and the survival of the aristocracy. The social elite in the Reform Era was still the same as the economic and political elite, but this changed in the second half of the century, as evidenced by the changes in the social composition of the Casino, and by the emergence of stand-alone casinos founded by the rising social strata.⁴⁹

The National Casino in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Now the library of the National Casino is part of the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' collection. We had had to wait for a long time process them but in the end of 2014 we started to explore this collection. It means nearly 20.000 books, but we don't know the exact numbers, as the work has not been finished. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences asked me to research and catalogue the remaining collection of the National Casino.

At the end of the last century a calculation was made. According to this, we have 13.000 books and 6.770 journals and magazines (around 450 titles). There are nearly 6.000 book records in the Aleph catalogue of our library at the moment in MARC21 format. About 4.000 of them are Hungarian documents, the rest is German, French, English, Latin or Italian materials. Most of these books were published in the 19th century or in the first part of the 20th century. The number of the old or rare books is more than 800 volumes. The first phase was the cataloguing of the Hungarian books, this work has been finished. The descriptions are based on the processing criteria for old books, enforcing the standards of our library and also applying the MARC21 standard.

We clean the books, catalogue them, digitize their title page and table of contents, attach them to the descriptions in the catalog and assign a new storage number to the works. When the reader finds the work in our catalogue, he will immediately see the

⁴⁹ Simon, „A reformkori magyar...”, 43.



11. Figure Stamp of the NC

part of the collection has also been catalogued. The work was done separately with books and periodicals, half of the exhibited materials was books and the other half was periodicals. Since then, we changed the books to periodicals in the Széchenyi Hall of the Museum. Now the library of the Academy lent 2500 volumes of journals to the Hungarian National Museum. Every year we make a new agreement with the Library of the Museum, to keep the books on exhibition as long as both parties support this.

The collection of the National Casino is in one of external warehouse sections of the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Törökbálint, we didn't merge it with the main collection. These volumes are very dusty, damaged and musty. Some of these have been shot through or contain bullets. Readers have limited access to this collection, but if they ask for a book, and we haven't got it in our own collection and if the physical conditions of the book allow it, the readers can get the NC book. Most of the books have half-leader or canvas binding, in the same style. Some books have the "N.C." monogram or the "National Casino" label on the binding or spine. A seal (Figure 8.) and an ex libris (Figure 9.) can be found in every volume of the National Casino. Up until now we have found 6 different types of NC stamps in the books. Many volumes are in need of restoration. The condition of leather bookbindings is critical because of the time that has passed.



12. Figure Ex libris

Many volumes came from the same bookbinder's workshop, as evidenced by the dry stamps at the end of the book, which read: „Molnár Mihály ezelőtt Bóka L. könyvkötő Budapesten”.

The present and future of the library of the Casino

Until now more than half of the collection has been recorded in the Aleph electronic catalogue, in MARC 21 format. Besides this work, we have started to research the history of the Casino, its members and its library.

This collection is very important to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and also to its library. As soon as we finish the processing of the books, we will start the statistical research of the collection.

Today, all volumes of the National Casino Yearbooks are available online through the REAL repository. The digitized booklets are the property of the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Budapest Collection of the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library, the Library of the Eötvös Loránd University and the National Széchényi Library. This opportunity provides a basis for further research, there are many unexplored details still in these documents.

Our library bought a new book cleaning machine a few years ago. OUR old books collection is rather dusty. This new machine is used by our warehouse staff to clean the NC books before we start the cataloging. This year we asked a company to disinfect the cataloged part of the collection, which is accessible to readers with permission. They disinfection of the 48 shelf meters (about 6000 pieces) of books was carried out by the company, Pre-Con Ltd, using a humidification process and formalin ultrasound.

The event, The Night of Museums 2018 was organized around the theme of the National Casino. An exhibition and lectures were organized, a casino room had been furnished and equipped, and our guests had the opportunity to try on contemporary clothes. This way our visitors could gain insight into the world of the National Casino. Some magnets had been made using the Ex libris and the Stamp of the Casino too, as a gift for the visitors. The event was a great success, we had more visitors than in the previous two years together. We received a lot of positive feedback from both professionals and visitors.

We would like to introduce the National Casino and its Library to as many people as possible. This collection is outstanding even today.

The expected result of the research of the National Casino Association, the exploration of the library and the detailed knowledge of the era will be a monograph which can serve as a basis for understanding the operating mechanisms of the Hungarian casino movement and for modelling of Hungary becoming a nation.

The results may provide a basis for further research. A summary of the history of the library is important for further research on the history of libraries, leadership, and culture. Aggregating and categorizing the data revealed in the descriptions may be suitable for use in writing work dealing with publication history, print history, press history, or binding analysis. The results of the examination of archival data may result in contact history research. However, the most extensive research on archival and library material can show how the readership of the nobility and the civic society was formed in Hungary through the activities of the NC, and how the Casino shaped the political opinion of the public.

ABSTRACT

The National Casino: Its history, library, members and future

The National Casino Association was founded in 1827 by István Széchenyi. During its nearly 120 years of existence, it was an integral part of the Hungarian public life and culture. The National Casino established its own library for its members. The methodically collected and systematized library exceeded the country's public libraries qualitatively and quantitatively as well. The collection contained books, newspapers, journals, magazines, maps and other printed matters. Most of the members donated books to the library. In the 19th-century there was always an official librarian who systematized, maintained the collection and documented the events.

The library of the National Casino had nearly 40.000 books before the Second World War. The leaders and the members tried to protect the property of the association, when they sensed danger, but after the Second World War they were unable to recover the collection

The Hungarian Minister of Interior dissolved the National Casino with a decree in the year 1945, because it proved to be a legal person contrary to the interests of the state. According to the association's statutes, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences inherits all assets of the Casino in case of dissolution. And so it happened, now the library of the National Casino is part of the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' collection. We had to wait for a long time for the opportunity to process the collection. We talk about nearly 20.000 books, but the processing hasn't been finished yet, so we don't know the exact number.

This collection is very important to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and also to its library, it is an important part of the Hungarian cultural heritage. Our library must manage, maintain and present it to the community. Our task is to preserve the memory of Széchenyi and the Casino, for example to hold presentations and exhibitions about the results of our Casino's research.