

AMERICAN HUNGARIAN EDUCATORS' ASSOCIATION

In November of 1974, responding to a request for suggestions on Hungarian cultural preservation and particularly on the role of the younger generation of teachers in the Hungarian community issued by the *Magyar Társaság* of Cleveland, Ohio, Enikő Molnár Basa presented an agenda at the annual conference of the Társaság. In this, she outlined her plans and ideas for an educational association, and presented them to conference participants who attended the organizational meeting. Approximately twelve persons,¹ mostly college or university instructors, joined in establishing the *American Hungarian Educators' Association* (AHEA) with Enikő Molnár Basa and Béla Biró being chosen as provisional officers. Several cardinal points laid down in the address were approved, and have continued to guide the organization since then. These were, first and foremost, a dedication to scholarly approaches in fostering Hungarian culture and language, and a decision to remain politically unaligned, whether in terms of international or of emigration politics. The emphasis on scholarly projects, it was felt, would best be served by the organization remaining free of imposed guidelines. The areas of activity for the Association were identified as:

- (1) activity within the professional associations of the members and
- (2) Hungarian language and cultural instruction of children.

The emphasis, however, was and remains on the scholarly arena, and addresses questions such as:

- how the Association can aid the teaching of Hungarian at U.S. and Canadian universities (such classes have in the past ceased, or were not established when conditions were otherwise favorable because of the indifference of Hungarian associations and of the Hungarian public);
- the language of instruction at the University level for such courses has to be English;
- there is a need for more quality English language books on literature, history and civilization in general.

In view of the Association's commitment to making Hungarian studies part of the consciousness and even of the curriculum of the American academic world, Dr. Basa stressed the need to cooperate in the cultural sphere with Hungary, whatever the political differences might be. The culture of a land is always represented by its inhabitants, and living traditions cannot be ignored.

A role was seen for the Association in the dissemination or production of text books, whether for children or for more advanced students.

In the following year, a membership campaign was undertaken; all persons with university connections, as well as teachers on various levels, and cultural leaders were contacted, at least to the extent that several mailing lists and membership registers could provide an address. About a hundred persons, a small but statistically good

percentage, responded. In the meanwhile, a constitution and by-laws were drafted, and plans were made for the 1975 conference. It had been decided that this could still be held within the framework of the *Magyar Társaság*, and so plans were made to meet in Cleveland. Unfortunately, the leadership of the *Magyar Társaság* objected to the presence of certain of the members and speakers, and generally tried to censor the content of the conference. Only one course of action remained: a full and complete break. Thus, while this first conference was still held in Cleveland, its site and program were completely independent of the other meeting, although coinciding in time.

Due to the interest in the Association, and the response to these early meetings, the following conference was planned as a 2-day affair to be held April 1-2, 1977 at Indiana University in Bloomington. The pattern set at this conference has been followed ever since, but expanded by a Thursday evening presentation and reception. Thus, the meetings now are held every spring from a Thursday evening through a Saturday night. The location varies, and every effort is made to site conferences close to Hungarian centers in the Eastern and Mid-Western United States, and to rotate these so that each region of the country has a turn. The bulk of Fridays and Saturdays at the conferences are devoted to panels: history, literature, folklore or anthropology, science or economics are some of the regularly recurring sections. Attention is paid to Hungarian-American problems, to specific problems of cultural maintenance, and also to Hungarian language instruction for children. This last category has been a concern of the Association from the beginning. However, more support from the week-end schools, the teachers in these schools, and by professionals in elementary and secondary education would be desirable to enrich the programs for this segment of the membership.

The annual meeting of the membership, and of the Executive Board, is also held during the conference, thus giving all attendees a chance to shape the future of the Association. But, in recognition of the wide geographical distribution of the membership, and of the difficulties of travel, elections are held every two years by mail ballot. Modifications of the constitution and by-laws are similarly submitted to the members. Officers are elected for two-year terms. The current (1986) officers are: Martha Pereszlényi-Pintér, President; George Bisztray, Vice-President, Katherine Gatto, Secretary, and Árpád Banda, Treasurer. The ex-officio members are the past president, the Directors of the *American Hungarian Folklore Centrum* and the *American Hungarian Librarians' Association*, and the Executive Director, who serves at the request of the president. The term of office is two years, with the possibility of re-election once to the same office; the ex-officio members serve according to the by-laws of respective affiliates.

From the outset, the Association has welcomed guests from Hungary to participate as speakers, or simply to join in the discussion. Happily, the number of such visitors continues to increase.

Conferences were held at Rutgers University, N. J. (1978), Silver Spring, MD (1979), and Toronto, Canada (1980). Professor George Bisztray at that time invited the AHEA to return to Toronto every three years, and so it was again the site of the 1983 and 1986 conferences. In 1986 a sister organization, the *Hungarian Studies Association of Canada* was one of the conference sponsors. In 1981 at Kent State University (Ohio), the conference was a 25th anniversary commemorative symposium. The papers presented here formed the basis of the book.² The *American Hungarian Folklore Centrum*, an affiliate of the AHEA co-sponsored the 1982 meeting at Montclair State College, N. J., and Ohio State University at Columbus hosted the 1984 meeting. In 1985, the Association returned to Indiana University in Bloomington.

In addition to the annual conferences, the AHEA has also contributed to a number of specialized symposia: one on Transylvania in 1979 at Kent State University in Ohio, on the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 at Brooklyn College, October 23, 1981, and a conference on Oszkár Jászi at Oberlin College in Ohio in 1985.

A brochure of the Association was printed shortly after its formal organization, and has been updated periodically. It serves as a membership form, and list the goals and activities of the Association briefly. Quoting these from the brochure, they are:

- support of ethnic and bicultural programs to broaden American and Canadian awareness of Hungarian contributions to our civilization, as well as to deepen the appreciation for Hungarian culture among ethnic Hungarians and others. The AHEA encourages both the maintenance of Hungarian language and studies in English;
- working with American and Canadian groups to further its aim of making Hungarian culture more widely known; with Hungarian and other European educational and cultural associations and groups when such cooperation advances the goal of a free and lively inter-intellectual exchange, and serves the interests of a living and developing Hungarian culture.

The AHEA publishes a newsletter, *The Educator*. Published three times a year, it carries news on Hungarian studies, study opportunities, recent publications, and naturally, news of the Association itself. It further serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas and has several thoughtful articles dealing with the problems of cultural maintenance.³ The Secretary is charged with the responsibility of its publication, and unfortunately, there have been issues that have failed to appear.⁴

The AHEA has obtained grants for various specialized projects from the *Department of Education* of the United States, the *National Endowment for the Arts* (NEA), and the *National Endowment for the Humanities* (NEH). The Department of Education grant was for a series of ten pamphlets on various aspects of Hungarian and Hungarian-American culture under the direction of Ruth Biró of Duquesne University. The NEA and NEH grants were obtained by the *American Hungarian Folklore Centrum* for folkdance symposia, and for projects of the *American Hungarian Museum*.

In pursuing its goal of cooperation with both Hungarian and non-Hungarian

groups to foster the awareness and dissemination of Hungarian culture, the AHEA, or individual members of the organization, work with *InterFuture*, a group sponsoring educational exchanges, the *Rotary International*, the *Modern Language Association of America*, and the *American Library Association*. The *InterFuture* program has been recently extended to Hungary through the efforts of Ruth Biró of Duquesne University. Information about schools and programs in Hungary for a Rotary International scholar has been requested from the Executive Director. Committees of the Congress concerned with both ethnic affairs and educational/cultural contacts also turn to the Directorate for information. Contacts are maintained with MELUS (the *Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*), and with the *Council on National Literatures*, as well as the *Ethnic Resources and International Studies Round Tables* of the *American Library Association*. Partially by using the network of the Association, Enikő Molnár Basa was able to initiate a permanent section within the *Modern Language Association* for Hungarian Literature, where programs have been hosted since 1974 at its annual conferences.

The AHEA serves librarians and information professionals. A formally organized group, HALO (*Hungarian-American Librarians' Organization*) has been initiated within the Association for this constituency, and they have contributed to the life of the Association in all its stages. The AHEA also works closely with the American Association for the Study of Hungarian History which has on occasion organized one or more panels at the conferences.

Notes

1. Enikő Molnár Basa, Peter Basa, Ruth G. Biró, Béla Biró, Ede Chaszar, Andrew Ludanyi, Thomas Szendrey, Agnes H. Vardy, and Stephen B. Vardy.
2. *The First War Between Socialist States: The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and Its Impact* (New York, Brooklyn College Press, Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1984).
3. Enikő Molnár Basa, "Commitment," 1, No. 1, (Oct. 1978); Barbara Lotze "Thoughts after Toronto," 3, No. 2 (Sept. 1980); MBK [Mary Boros-Kazai] "Hungarian Studies," 3, No. 3 (Dec. 1980); MBK-ABK [Mary Boros-Kazai and Andras Boros-Kazai] "The Hungarian Chair at Bloomington, Indiana," 4, No. 1 (March 1981); George Bisztray, "Wither AHEA?" 4, No. 1 (March 1983); Paul Bódy, "Hungarian Identity in North America," 6, No. 2 (Sept. 1983).
4. Volume 1 only had one issue, in October of 1978; volume 2 lacked the Spring issue; volume 7 had only one issue, in December, 1984; and volume 8 had only two issues, June and October, 1985.

American Hungarian Educators' Association
Silver Spring

Enikő Molnár Basa