

Municipal „Madách Imre” Library Local History Collection

After the name of its last owner, the mansion built in classicistic style in the early 19th century and thatched with tiles of wood is also known in the town as „Csillagház” (‘Star House’). This historic building has been housing the Local History Collection of the library since 1977. Its collection of books provide information about the history, geography, economic and cultural life of the town and the small region surrounding it. Its collection of picture postcards totals nearly 1500 pieces; they display architectural relics dating from the period between the end of the 19th and the middle of the 20th century. The data base „Esze Tamás” contains several times ten thousand sheets providing information about writers and scientists who lived in county Nógrád in the 18-20th centuries. Estate documents stored here give an insight into the life of a small town in the first half of the 20th century. The slide and photo collection displays state feasts and programs, social and family events, gala dresses, habits, the lifestyle of the 20th century. Tens of thousand of individual data can be accessed in a digitalized format in the computerized documents preserved in our visual collections.

Exhibition displaying the history of a pharmacy

Local historical research has identified Anton Stampek as the first apothecary settling in our town in 1761. At the beginning of the 19th century, there were already two pharmacies at Balassagyarmat, their sign-boards showing their names: “Holy Spirit” and “Hungarian Crown”. In the first half of the 20th century, this latter one was owned by apothecary Rókus Rebmann. His wife Valéria Horváth was a real society lady playing an active role in charitable associations; she was also well-known for her excellent cuisine.

The exhibition (opened in 1999 as a result of László Reiter’s pharmaceutical research and organizational work) shows documents, furniture and equipment of the Hungarian Crown Pharmacy.

Madách Room – water-colour paintings by Károly Balogh

The Library wears the name of the well-known 19th century Hungarian playwright Imre Madách, author of the philosophic-dramatic poem Tragedy of Man. The institution possesses copies of all Hungarian editions of his main work besides some foreign translations and a multitude of publications interpreting the drama.

Károly Balogh Jr. was the nephew of Imre Madách. His mother Mária, sister of the playwright died a tragic death. Her husband Károly Balogh fighting as an officer in the Hungarian War of Independence was wounded in Transylvania in 1849. Mária went after him to assist her wounded husband on the way home, but the couple was killed by highwaymen. Only their one-year old son Károly survived the tragedy who had been left with his grandmother in the castle at Alsósztrégova. The orphan was raised by Imre Madách together with his own son Aladár, who was of nearly the same age.

Károly Balogh Jr. was an amateur drawer and painter; he painted some aquarelles, too. A lawyer by profession, he worked in the Ministry of Justice. In 1875 he married Margit Bérczy, daughter of Károly Bérczy (Balassagyarmat-born poet, translator and editor of newspapers). At the exhibition we can see, among others, a coloured pencil drawing showing the Biedermeier interior of the flat where his father-in-law lived in Pest.

Exhibition commemorating graphic artist and banknote designer Endre Horváth

The designer of the most beautiful Hungarian paper banknotes was born at Bazin in county Pozsony (today in Slovakia, Pezinok) on March 3, 1896. His father, Géza Horváth, was a nobleman having his family estates at Bibith and Legénd; his mother, Gizella Soós, came from a family having its estates at Zsitvagyarmat in county Bars. The father worked as a clerk (land registrar). In 1908 the family moved to Balassagyarmat, and Endre Horváth finished his secondary grammar school studies in this town. After passing the secondary school final examination in 1914, he started to read law, but his studies were interrupted by World War I. From May 15, 1915 till October 1918 he served as an officer and was finally discharged as an infantry lieutenant.

Between 1919–1925 he studied graphics at the School of Applied Arts, his master was Ferenc Helbing, a painter and graphic artist.

The Hungarian Kingdom winning its independence after being defeated in World War I had to execute a monetary reform. In order to stop the inflation, a new currency (“pengő”) was introduced on January 1, 1927. In the transitory period, the National Bank of Hungary announced a tender with invited participants to design the new currency, what was won by Ferenc Helbing. Based on his recommendation, Endre Horváth was employed at the Banknote Printing Office where he participated in drawing the first “pengő” banknotes; later he studied the art of copperplate engraving under the guidance of engraver Ruppert Franke. Endre Horváth learnt this technique on an artistic level: he used surfaces decorated with lines and dots of various density and depth to achieve special tones that were considered a novelty in his profession. Besides drawing and copperplate engraving he also designed banknotes. In this latter area, he created his own style using Hungarian folk art motifs.

To prevent the counterfeiting of banknotes, rotary copper printers were developed in Hungary in the 1930s fully displaying the sharpness and depth of fine lines. These Hungarian machines were used in several European banknote printing offices; one of these was in Belgium. In 1936 Endre Horváth was invited to teach the technology of copper engraving and printing to the staff of the National Bank of Belgium in Brussels. He got acquainted with a young clerk Hardy Rajmonde whom he married on February 27, 1937. After spending 18 months in Belgium, he did not accept the offer of the British company De La Rue and returned to Hungary with his young wife at Christmas 1937. The marriage ended soon with a divorce by mutual consent, and his former wife returned to Belgium.

In February 1937, Endre Horváth was awarded with the silver medal of the National Association of Hungarian Applied Arts. In 1939 he was appointed supervisor at the National Bank of Hungary. In recognition of his works displayed at the Hungarian National Applied Arts Exhibition at Kassa (now in Slovakia, Košice), in May 1943 he received the gold medal of applied arts donated by the Hungarian state to the best graphic artist of Hungary. In 1943, Endre Horváth was elected Managing Vice-Chairman of the National Association of Hungarian Applied Arts. In order to study the Hungarian folk art, the association initiated the establishment of applied art centres in Transylvania, in the so-called “Palóc” region in Northern Hungary and in Transdanubia, where creative artists could get in direct touch with the folk culture. Endre Horváth selected the models of the banknotes he designed primarily from Palóc villages: the 2 pengő banknote depicted a mother and her small daughter from Hollókő as well as a peasant girl from Bény dressed in traditional folk costumes; the 20 pengő banknote showed reapers from Patak. The implementation of his ideas were hindered by the outbreak of the war. During World War II, he kept on working at the Banknote Printing Office, where he survived the siege of Budapest. Shaken by the horrors he experienced, he sold a part of his works so as to be able to help war orphans and others in need.

Inflation accelerated in 1945, thus banknotes of always higher denominations had to be printed. One of the greatest inflations of history ended on August 1, 1946 with the introduction of the “forint”. Endre Horváth designed first the 10 forint banknote, then the 100 forint one; these displayed colleagues from the Banknote Printing Office. Just like the banknotes in the inflation period, these were printed in an offset procedure. The new, copper-printed 10 forint banknote of stable value was issued on February 27, 1947 displaying a portrait of poet Sándor Petőfi. Contemporary press evaluated it as the most beautiful banknote in Europe. The new banknote series was designed by Endre Horváth using portraits of historical personalities (20 forint banknote: peasant leader György Dózsa, 50 forint: prince Ferenc Rákóczi II, new 100 forint: governor Lajos Kossuth). In addition to designing and engraving banknotes, he was given several other tasks, too. He designed state papers, passports and state bonds. The overburdened artist went into consumption and had to go to a sanatorium for a cure, thus a part of the forint banknotes were designed by his colleague Zoltán Nagy.

Endre Horváth was well-known all over the world and received several job offers from abroad. In 1947, a company from Milan offered him a position in Switzerland, where he ought to engrave only two banknotes a year. According to another offer from Buenos Aires, his work would have been only

one banknote per year – but he stayed at the Hungarian Banknote Printing Office. After being ill for nearly two and half years, he returned to his working place in 1950 as its arts director.

From the banknotes designed by Endre Horváth, 26 were issued by the National Bank of Hungary. In addition to these, 46 designs are also known from the period between 1933 and 1946, the plates of which are at the Banknote Printing Office. The most famous is the 10 pengő banknote depicting Bözsi Sipéki dressed in a folk costume typical for the village of Órhalom. Using the art of Dürer as his starting point and relying on the results achieved in the past centuries, Endre Horváth renewed Hungarian copper engraving in the 20th century. He applied his new technique in banknote production, small graphics and stamps, too.

In the summer of 1954, he spent his vacation at Hollókő collecting folk art motives. Prior to the end of his holidays he was unexpectedly called back to his working place. His remaining health was consumed by the over-forced work tempo; he got a heart attack and died at his desk on October 13, 1954.

In spite of not being born at Balassagyarmat, Endre Horváth considered it his home town all the time. His mother and sister lived here, and the tired artist seeking rest visited them. He is buried here, his grave monument was created on the basis of his copper engraving *The Fates* by sculptor István Szabó.

His artistic estate was maintained by his sister Mrs. Rókus Rebmann who donated it to the town in 1983. In memory of his brother she established a foundation, too, acknowledging the work of artists having ties to Balassagyarmat. Since the end of the 1970s, a memorial exhibition commemorating Endre Horváth is displayed as part of the Local History Collection of the Municipal „Madách Imre” Library; it contains – in addition to documents, drawings and paintings, aquarelles and small graphics, copper engravings – valuable furniture, personal belongings and china, textiles, laces, Kelim carpets once owned by the artist.

The memorial exhibition was designed by András Kovalcsik, trustee and publisher of the estate.