

The Hungarian Consulates and the Educational Needs of Hungarian Schools in Canada, 1936-1940: Documents

Iván Halász de Békly
(translator and compiler)

Culture maintenance is of prime concern to all immigrant groups. One of the most important components of this issue is the passing on to the second generation of the ancestral language. A still more specific problem related to the question of the long-term preservation of the immigrants' culture is the responsibility that the country of origin has for the helping of its former citizens—and their descendants—in their cultural aspirations. Should the native country assist its one-time nationals in the maintenance of their native culture? And if yes, to what lengths should the country of emigration go to achieve this aim? More specifically, should the "mother country" supply communities of its nationals settled in alien lands with educational materials such as textbooks, readers, dictionaries and so on?

These questions seem to have been of considerable concern to Hungarian Canadians in the years before the Second World War. At least, this is what is suggested by the documents presented here, which are letters exchanged between Hungarian consular officials in Canada and Hungarian Canadians from Regina and Welland, two important centres of Hungarian community life at the time in Saskatchewan and Ontario respectively. The documents, which appear in English translation, were collected during a year of extensive research in the Hungarian National Archives.* Although the holdings of this

**The documents are from the following collection: Winnipegi Konzulátus (K 139), Külügyminisztériumi Levéltár, Polgári Kori Központi Kormányhatóságok Levéltárai, Magyar Országos Levéltár, Budapest. (Winnipeg Consulate (K 139), Ministry of External Affairs Archives, Archives of the Central Authorities of the Bourgeois Era, Hungarian National Archives, Budapest.)*

institution had suffered much damage during the Second World War and the Revolution of 1956, some collections have survived which contain valuable information on the economic, political, social and cultural situation of pre-World War II Hungarian immigrants and their settlements in Canada. Most of this information is contained in what might best be called "consular records": correspondence between consular staff and Hungarian Canadians or Hungarian-Canadian organizations, and reports sent to Budapest by the Hungarian consul in Winnipeg, or the consul-general in Montreal. The latter consist mainly of assessments of Canadian economic conditions during the 1920s and '30s and their impact on the Hungarian-Canadian community. These consular records also contain some information on such matters as the establishment of the first Canada-wide federation of Hungarian Canadians in 1928, and contacts between Hungarian-Canadian organizations and authorities in Hungary.

The letters printed here relate to the question of assistance from Hungary for the teaching of the Magyar language to second-generation Hungarian Canadians. They represent a random selection. Nevertheless, they convey the importance that Hungarian Canadians attached to this issue at the time. It is hoped that the printing of these documents will stimulate interest in this important but neglected subject, or might evoke some comparisons. It would be interesting to examine, for example, the respective attitudes to this issue of a number of European countries during the pre-World War II era, or to compare the policies on this question of Hungary's pre-1945 and post-war regimes.

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Royal Hungarian Consulate
625 Royal Bank of Canada Bldg.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

2232 McAra St.
Regina, Sask.
July 9, 1936

My Dear Sir:

I have noticed with trepidation that the Hungarians of Regina have no future with regard to the continued use of their language and the promotion of a stronger connection with our

dismembered homeland. This hurts many patriotic Hungarians, but unfortunately, we have no true leader. Our fathers do not cultivate unity, therefore, gatherings at which the youth could learn Hungarian are not possible. They (our predecessors) still know the Hungarian language the way they learned it, but we, the second generation, are gradually losing the awareness of how immensely proud we should be, in front of the whole world, of being Hungarians.

Since the majority of Hungarian youth were born here and did not attend Hungarian school, they cannot write and read Hungarian. There is no one to teach them.

My Dear Sir: I would like to perform this great task. I want to transplant into the Hungarian youth growing up here the little knowledge which I acquired in the elementary school back home and in grade twelve in this country, along with the germ of my patriotism. In order to perform this undertaken plan with success, I need Hungarian books; mostly first, second and third grade schoolbooks. Sir, I beg you, if books serving the aforementioned purpose do exist, kindly let me know from where and how I could obtain them.

Most of all, I would like to teach a Hungarian summer school before the English school starts.

Always a servant of our country and our Hungarian heritage,

I remain,
Jenő Horváth

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July 16, 1936

COPY

Mr. Jenő Horváth
2232 McAra Street
Regina, Sask.

Having just returned from my official trip today, I received your very commendable letter of July 9. There are no Hungarian elementary schoolbooks on stock at this office, therefore, I cannot send any immediately, because I must request them from Budapest and it may take a few months before they arrive. This means that the plan of a summer school to be held this year will have to be postponed.

Some time ago, the Roman Catholic pastor, Robert Koch

received a few books, and, as far as I know, offered a summer course by utilising these. Kindly visit the Hungarian Catholic church and inquire as to whether these books are still available. Of course, it is also possible that Reverend Koch gave these books away as presents. There is a small Hungarian library in the Hungarian Hall, and it is possible that there are one or two textbooks among those books as well. But I do not know this for sure.

Please let me know if you find any Hungarian textbooks in Regina.

With patriotic greetings,
(Petényi)

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2232McAra St.
Regina, Sask.
July 22, 1936

Mr. Petényi, Esq.
Royal Hungarian Consul
625 Royal Bank of Canada Bldg.

My Dear Sir:

At the suggestion of your letter no. 2817 I visited the Roman Catholic Church and found twenty-five grade one textbooks. Utilising these, I started the Hungarian school on July 20 and have twenty-five Hungarian boys and girls registered already. I requested the Hungarian Hall to teach the children, but since the board of directors did not support my effort very much, I teach in a room in the Roman Catholic church.

Sir, I ask you most humbly to please let me know whether you see any hope for students of Hungarian origin born abroad who study well but do not have the means to attend a *Hungarian university*.

Yours respectfully,

No. 2817
Royal Hung.
ARR. July 23, 1936
FILE NO. 2919
ENCL.

Jenő Horváth

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2919

July 23, 1936

Mr. Jenő Horváth
2232 McAra Street
Regina, Sask.

COPY

I received your kind letter of July 22nd, and it was with pleasure that I learned that you managed to find a solution for the textbooks required for the summer school by borrowing these from the local Roman Catholic Church. I do hope that the school will prove to be a wonderful and complete success. At the end of the summer school session, please inform me about its course and return the borrowed textbooks to the Roman Catholic Church so that they may be available in the future as well.

I cannot give you information regarding your question relating to Hungarian universities. Please contact the Standing Organizing Office of the World Congress of Hungarians (Géza Street 4, Budapest) directly regarding this matter, since this office is in charge of the tuition-free university education in Budapest of the second generation abroad.

With patriotic greetings,
(Petényi)

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NO. 2817

Royal Hung.
ARR. Aug. 25, 1936
FILE NO. 3314
ENCL.

2232 McAra Street
Regina, Sask.
August 24, 1936

Mr. Petényi, Esq.
625 Royal Bank of Canada Bldg.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

You asked me in your letter of June 23 to inform you at the end of the summer school about its course. I finished teaching after one month and am glad to report to you that this tuition free short course was a success. Thirty-seven Hungarian boys and girls registered. This school ended with a short

Hungarian exam to which the parents were invited as well.
I returned the books to the Roman Catholic church.

Respectfully,
Jenő Horváth

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3314

August 25, 1936
COPY

Mr. Jenő Horváth
2232McAra Street
Regina, Sask.

Thank you for your kind information of the 24th of this month. Please accept my thanks for your valuable and patriotic activities regarding the summer school in Regina.

With patriotic greetings,
(Petényi)

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From the Parish Council of the
Hungarian Reformed Church of Welland
Welland, Ontario
Febr. 11, 1939

Royal Hungarian Consulate General
Montreal, Que.

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Febr. 14, 1939
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Most Respected Consulate General,

The undersigned turn to the consulate with the modest request that if any kind of books have arrived or will arrive from the beloved Old Country to the office of the Consulate General for distribution among Hungarians, then if possible, kindly do not forget about our Welland Hungarian Reformed Church (which has been battling with many hardships) and please send our share to us at any time (sic). Indeed in 1938,

I was unable to offer a Hungarian summer school session to eighty-two Hungarian children because we have absolutely no Hungarian grammar books; consequently, our children suffered a great setback in Hungarian language and history. Waiting for the precious support of the Consulate General, I remain, in the name of the parish,

With patriotic greetings,

Bálint Kertész
church caretaker

Welland, Ont. Febr. 15, 1940
15 Griffith St.

765

FEBR. 17, 1940

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His Excellency Dr. Károly Winter
Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary
Montreal, Que.

Your Excellency,

Allow me to attach, on behalf of Mrs. János Dábi (?), the delivery certificate and twenty-five cent postage.

With your kind permission, let me use the opportunity to request Hungarian grammar books or textbooks or any other Hungarian teaching materials, if such are now available at your office. A sizeable percentage of our people in Welland and Niagara Falls live on social aid and cannot afford such things; the treasuries of our churches are also empty. Experience has proven that it is of no avail if I gather the children for three or four hours a day to teach Hungarian, since I must give them something which occupies their time for homework and learning.

I would be most grateful for Your Excellency's support in this matter.

With best wishes, I remain,

Sincerely yours,
Károly Farkas

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February 19, 1940

The Reverend Károly Farkas,
Minister of the Reformed Church
15 Griffith St.
Welland, Ont.

COPY

My Dear Reverend,

In response to your letter of the 15th of this month, I regretfully inform you that the Consulate General has no Hungarian books at the present time which could be suitable for teaching.

If you turned, however, directly to the Royal Hungarian Ministry of Religion and Education, I shall be most eager to forward your request to the proper desk with my supportive recommendation.

With utmost respect,

Envoy Extraordinary and Minister
Plenipotentiary

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Welland, Ont. Feb. 22nd, 1940
15 Griffith Street

765
FEB. 22, 1940
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His Excellency Dr. Károly Winter
Envoy Extraordinady and Minister Plenipotentiary
Montreal, Que.

Your Excellency,

I am most grateful for your kind letter of the 19th of this month with respect to the Hungarian books.

Unfortunately, I cannot turn in this matter to the forum you mentioned, since it was more than ten years ago that I sent a request there related to the same subject, and have not received any answer since.

May I, therefore, stand by my hope that, should Your Excellency receive such books in the future, then, if possible, please think of us.

Asking for your benevolent support for all times, I am

yours sincerely,

Károly Farkas