



“Glory to the defeated!” said the Romans, in honor of their valiant vanquished foes. Here it is said in homage to the Freedom Fighters of 1956. (A volume of collected poems dealing with the Revolution also bears the same title.)

## Gloria Victis

Watson Kirkconnell

How shall we thank the men and maids heroic  
Who faced with valiant hearts and empty  
hands  
A saurian monster from the Mesozoic,  
An armoured dragon from the darkened lands?

Out of the schoolroom and the busy smithy,  
Out of the kitchen and the draper’s shop,  
They swarmed exultant into Vulcan’s stithy,  
In Freedom’s name they bade the horror stop.

Then for a moment from the beast malignant  
There came no rip of claw, no gnash of tooth,  
Attentive lest a wakened world indignant  
Should rouse from sloth and strike a blow for Truth.

The West was silent, and the Brontosaurus,  
Bellowing down the streets of those dark days,  
Trampled to blood and death the youthful chorus  
That sang but now in Liberty’s high praise.

Yet who can lock to love the grave’s black portal?  
Deep in the anguish of the poet’s mind  
The Magyar spirit shall abide immortal  
And rise triumphant to redeem mankind.

*Watson Kirkconnell (1895-1977) was President of Acadia University, one of Canada’s oldest. He was a scholar, renowned for his translations of Ukrainian, Russian, Serb, Croat and Hungarian poetry.*



## In Memoriam: Gérecz Attila, the Martyr Poet of 1956

Karolina Szabó

During the great flood of June 2013 in Hungary, I hourly watched *Hirado.hu* for information about the situation there. One of the news reporters told that the Duna flooded the penitentiary at Vác. It brought back memories of another flood, when listening to *Szabad Europa rádió* (Radio Free Europe) was punishable in Hungary; when my father listened to it anyway, huddling, ear pressed close, to hear the words through the static. He whispered to us that someone escaped from Vác prison by swimming across the cold water of the Duna. Years later I found out that that “someone” was Gérecz Attila, the martyr poet of 1956.

Some say he was a new Petőfi, others say he was Radnóti. For us, who lived through the Rákosi era, the 1956 revolution, he was a poet, sportsman, and a martyr of a sadistic Communist regime.

Attila was born on November 20, 1929 in Dunakeszi, a small, nice town in the Budapest metropolitan area. His father was Vitéz Gérecz Ödön, an engineer for the Hungarian Railroad (MÁV). He was a well-educated man, who received his title for his bravery during WWI, which stigmatized Attila's short life. His father's death in 1943 left his mother, Básthy Irén, to raise her three sons, Ödön, Árpád and Attila. Ödön chose the military; Árpád became a violin virtuoso, and conductor.

At age 15, Attila joined the cadet school of Nagyvárad in the fall of 1944. As a student of the military, in 1945 his troop was sent to Germany first, then to France, where he was captured and was a prisoner of war. He was released and returned to Hungary on October 23, 1946. By way of private schools, he finished his high school (3 years in one year) and had his final state exam at the *Kölcsey Ferenc Gimnázium* in Budapest. Because his family was considered "kulák", he was not able to go to a university; he went to a trade school and became a lathe operator, and worked in Csepel. He spent his free time on sports. He excelled in swimming, horseback riding, fencing, and shooting. In 1949 he became a member of the Hungarian Pentathlon Selected. He was looking forward to a bright future.

But it was not to be. In 1950, together with his cadet friends, he was arrested for treason. Four of them were sentenced to death, three were hanged, and Attila was sentenced to 15 years in jail.

He wrote his first poem, *Így bocskorosan* (Thus, with strapped footwear), in the jail of Vác. He also translated poems from German, French and English writers. This was under Nagy Imre's reign, when life in prisons was eased; they were allowed to walk outside. Here he met Tollas Tibor, Márkus László, Hámosi Jenő, Kárpáti Kamil and other poets and authors. During their walks they shared their works. Attila's works were often written on toilet paper or on small bits of paper, which were

smuggled out of prison; sometimes in their entirety, sometimes only in fragments. The poems of these authors were published later in the West under the title "*Fűveskert*" (lit. Herb Garden – the English adaptation was published under the title "*From the Hungarian Revolution*"). The name was selected after the small park in front of the prison chapel.

A disastrous flood occurred in July 1954. The Duna flooded in the Hungarian territory; half the Szigetköz area was flooded, and the flood, going downstream, crested at Vác by the 18<sup>th</sup>. Attila escaped from prison, swimming across the cold water (14 °C) of the Duna. He had to swim under water for about 40 yards. He was in the water for about an hour, fighting cramps, and pain in his body, and stormy, rushing water and rapids. He was able to reach Budapest, but his freedom lasted only three days. He was captured and received an additional 3 years in tight security prison. He was transferred from Vác to Pest, then to Márianosztra, where he had to spend 30 days in solitary confinement, alternating with 30 days in a dark cell, over and over again.

The Revolution of 1956 reached him in Pest, in the Kozma út prison, and he was released on October 30<sup>th</sup>.

The Russian army, which was waiting at the border for the right moment to return to Hungary, did just that. On November 4<sup>th</sup>, Attila joined the revolutionaries and fighting on the streets of Budapest. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, he called his sweetheart, whom he lovingly called *Kicsi*, from a phone booth on the corner of Nyár and Dohány utca. She begged him to come home. His answer was, "I can't put down the gun and fail my country". At Rókus Hospital, he shot and destroyed two Russian tanks, but the third one, a T-34 let out a series of shots and as he crossed the street, took his young life just days before his 27<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Two young soldiers delivered the

tragic news of his passing. His sweetheart Dreschel Mária found his body at 29 Dohány utca. A woman from the house brought a white sheet and they covered him, another brought a ladder to carry his body. He was buried at the Budapest VII district of Klauzál tér. A second funeral was held on February 11, 1957, at the Kerepesi Cemetery, Plot #21, where the Revolution's other victims were buried. (In 1977, news went around that the anti-56 government would eliminate Plot # 21. Attila's remains were exhumed and buried in his mother's grave in the Megyeri úti Cemetery. On May 8, 2001, both his and his mother's remains were reburied in the Kerepesi Cemetery, Plot #21) The six years, from the day of his arrest in 1950, to his death in 1956, were a torture. At the same time he also became one of Hungary's first class poets. His first poem, *Így bocskorosan*, according to critics, was the work of a well-established poet.

### ***Így bocskorosan***

*Így bocskorosan úgy-e megnevettek,  
hogy márványt törni hegynek indulok?  
A számon pimasz mosolygás a jelszó,  
fütyöm csibészes: én is feljutok!*

*Nincs tömött zsákom s hegyászó botom,  
segítő kezét tán egy társ sem ad,  
de vihart-oldó déli szél kölyökfejemre  
borzol lágy barackokat!*

*S a hegytetőn majd minden mezt lehántva,  
én is kacagva szélnek öltözök,  
karjukra fűznek mind a fénynyalábok  
s eltáncolunk a fejetek fölött!*

*Így bocskorosan úgy-e megnevettek,  
hogy márványt törni hegynek indulok?  
A számon pimasz mosolygás a jelszó,  
fütyöm csibészes: én is feljutok!*





The members of the *Füveskert Club* kept writing even in prison. They dreamed of an anthology. They dreamed of writing more, and more for us, for the future. They also fought for the freedom from a sadistic government and foreign army occupation; they dreamed of forgiveness, love and unity. They did not want to be martyrs, they wanted to live!

The poems of Gérecz Attila were published in München, Germany, in the monthly newspaper *Nemzetőr*, edited by Tollas Tibor from 1957.

In 1991, 35 years after his death, this poem was published for the first time in "*Gérecz Attila, a költő – 1956 mártírja*" (Gérecz Attila, the Poet – Martyr of 1956). The book included memories of Attila by his fellow poet-prisoners, with the foreword written by Göncz Árpád (President of Hungary at the time). In 1995, most of Attila Gérecz' poems were published in "*Füveskert 1954-1995*", edited by four of his fellow-prisoners. This was followed by publication of his complete work, under the title of "*Így bocskorosan*" in 2001, by Kráter.

In the same year, Stádium published a volume of Gérecz' poetry entitled "*Sorsod művészete*" that included a number of studies and essays on his life and work. In 2006, Stádium put out a further volume, "*Sorsod művészete 2*". The following year, the same publisher issued a work dealing with Gérecz' escape from Vác prison at the time of the flood. All of these prove that Gérecz Attila and his poetry have not been forgotten.

There is a plaque in his memory at Klauzál tér, where every year a small group of poets who knew him, and a few young ones, go on pilgrimage on the anniversary of his death. Every fall, the young members of the pentathlon team remember Attila by organizing a contest.

In 2000, he received posthumously the "Balassa Bálint Memorial-Sword". Makovecz Imre (for a biography, see Magyar News Online, December 2011 issue) presented this recognition to a young man, who won the pentathlon contest that year. On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2004 the city of Dunakeszi bestowed upon Gérecz Attila the title

of "Honorary Citizen".

In front of me is "*Gérecz Attila, a költő – 1956 mártírja*" and I am reading his last poem:

### **Levél**

*Tavaszcél írok Éva,*

*A tavasz neked tán egyszerű.*

*De itt mélyebb, lázadóbb a derű.*

*Lázadóbb, mint a szél, mely néha be-be csap ide, mint a héja.*

*Pedig máskor illatos és szelíd.*

*Fiatal leány, ki egy korsó hús itallal a forrás felől közelít.*

*Tele álmainkkal, tele dallal,*

*nyakunk köré hulló puha karral...*

*Örömmek, csóknak, Éva más az íze itt.*

*Élmény. Megrázóbb, mint az álom.*

*Kicsit úrrá leszel a halálon.*

*A halál?*

*Itt szürke, mint mi vagyunk, Éva.*

*Körbe-körbe jár,*

*Naponta, mint a séta,*

*hátratett kézzel s lehajlott fejjel az udvaron.*

*Ott fáradt, s oly elcsigázva tapos össze az Idő,*

*mint igába vert nyomtató barom.*

*Itt szememben van a temető,*

*S ahogy nézem – s írom Neked azt a verset,*

*mindig más.*

*Hegedő*

*és újra összevert seb.*

Yes, I am thinking of Petőfi, who died in the Revolution of 1848, I also think of Radnóti. He was sent to a death camp because of the religion into which he was born, scrutinized as was Attila because of his father's title. Radnóti wrote:

*"Oly korban éltem én e földön, mikor gyermeknek átok volt az anyja".*

(I lived on this earth in an age when a child's mother was its curse.)

And I am praying with Attila's words:

*Szállj, ragyogj te mennyei fény,*

*angyalzarnyú ének,*

*fájó szívéen: magyar szívéen*

*minden remetének.*

*Add Urunk, hogy rab és szegény*

*mind testvérré leljünk!*

*Áldd meg hazánk, hogy a remény átölelje lelkünk!*

(from: "*Boldog Özséb Himnusza*", Vác, June, 1955)

*Karolina Szabo is Webmaster for Magyar News Online.*

## **Art as Ambassador: Hungarian Masterpieces**

Together with Quinnipiac University's Central European Institute, the Southport Galleries announce a special art exhibition consisting of 26 pieces from the Nancy G. Brinker and Christian L. Sauska Collections. The exhibit showcases 15 of Hungary's most important artists from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present time. Special emphasis is given the work of Rippl-Rónai József, considered the father of Hungary's modern art movement. The exhibit may be viewed at Southport Galleries, 330 Pequot Avenue, Southport, CT. and will be open until October 19<sup>th</sup>.

EFP



Rippl-Rónai :Portrait of a Lady in a Brown Dress

## Old Photo Documents "Sütni szalonna" Tradition

The enclosed photograph (courtesy of John J. Link), dating back to circa 1942, has caught the ritualistic "szalonna sütés" – known locally as "sütni szalonna" or "Hungarian turkey" – as it was practiced in the Bridgeport area.

As Stephen Link recalls, they would first have to gather stones to line a round pit, then start a fire in the pit with wood chunks. From the apple trees in the yard, they would next cut saplings with a "handle". These "nyárs" (spits) would then be sharpened, and barbs would be cut into them, making them look like fishhooks. Then the *szalonna* would have to be cut, and the vegetables – onions, green peppers, cucumbers – prepared. And the bread – the good crusty rye bread – would have to be sliced. When the wood burned down to charcoal, the *szalonna* would be scored and put on the *nyárs*, which would be turned to get the fat dripping. With a slice of bread held under the drippings, and the onions and peppers added, you had a delicious Hungarian-style barbecue.

Makes your mouth water, doesn't it?

The photo shows (l. to r.) Stephen's mother, Irene Koteles Link; Irene's mother, Elizabeth Papp Koteles; Stephen as a little boy; Ida Berecz, Irene's sister; Mary Kish Link, Stephen's paternal grandmother; Louis Berecz, Ida's husband; and John Link, Irene's husband. The locale was Steve Koteles' mink farm in Milford.



## Christopher Ball Inaugurated as Honorary Consul of Hungary

Lucy Berry

*The following report was written by Business Reporter Lucy Berry of The Huntsville (Alabama) Times and is used by permission.*



*Christopher Ball and György Szapáry, the Hungarian Ambassador*

Christopher Ball, director of the [Central European Institute](#) and [István Széchenyi Chair in International Economics](#) at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Conn., received the honor during an inauguration ceremony attended by several Quinnipiac administrators, U.S. Hungarian Ambassador György Szapáry, Consul General Károly Dán and Deputy State Director for Global Affairs Szabolcs Takács.

Ball said the main task of an honorary consul is to promote business, science, academic and cultural relations between the U.S. and Hungary.

"My initial reaction when asked to accept the position was, 'But I'm not Hungarian!'" he said. "I am a proud American and have no ethnic

connection to Hungary. Once they explained that an honorary consul is precisely someone who is a non-Hungarian but helps Hungary and Hungarians and promotes relations between the countries, then I was much more interested. When they explained that this was in many ways recognizing my work for many years, I was honestly honored. I still am."

Ball said the Hungarian government

approached him about the honorary consul title because of his work promoting U.S. and Hungarian relations for the past 20 years. A year ago, he flew to Washington, D.C. to meet with the U.S. Ambassador to Hungary to discuss the position.

"I then had a background check through the state police of Connecticut and submitted papers to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," he said. "They then review those over a few months and the Foreign Minister finally signs it. At that point it goes to the U.S. State Department who reviews and eventually approves the appointment. The U.S. State Department then issued me a U.S. diplomatic ID."

Ball said he already does many of the tasks required of an honorary consul, but he will take on new responsibilities since being named to the position.

Duties could include providing notary services required for paperwork in Hungary or helping Hungarian-Americans who fled communism and want to reclaim their Hungarian citizenship with paperwork.

"Also, if a Hungarian is visiting the U.S. and finds themselves in jail, they can call my office and I can go to the jail on their behalf to help the same way an American in a foreign country would call the U.S. Embassy," he said.

Although he grew up in Huntsville, Ball was born in Atlanta and graduated from Huntsville High in 1990. He earned a bachelor's degree in economics from UAH in 1994 after spending a summer in 1992 backpacking around Europe and studying at the London School of Economics.

"That was my first time outside the U.S. and I felt my whole world changed," he said. "Studying with top economics students from around the world also convinced me that I wanted to be an economics professor."

After graduating from UAH, he was given the opportunity to move to Hungary for a year to work as an assistant to an economist in the Privatization Ministry. The job fell through, so he began work as the program director for the Hungarian Atlantic Council.

Ball earned his Ph.D. in economics from Texas A&M University in 2003, the same year he began working as a professor at Quinnipiac University. In 2011, he established CEENET Inc. (Central and Eastern European Network), a private association of Connecticut professionals interested in fostering stronger ties between Connecticut and Central and Eastern Europe through international business.



*Christopher Ball and the Hungarian Scouts from Wallingford, CT*

## St. Emery's Church - - Historic Place

Carroll Fencil



The exciting and gratifying news was received soon after review by a distinguished 12-member group of Connecticut architects and historians (members of the Connecticut Historic Preservation Council, Department of Economic and Cultural Development, appointed by the Governor of Connecticut), who voted to place St. Emery's church on the State list of Historic Places. History made history!

### The Qualifications

We were able to achieve this prestigious Historic Places recognition thanks to the hard work of Hungarian European immigrants arriving in America beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, who established St. Emery's church 80 years ago and ascertained its art and architectural qualifications. They created the beautiful church in 1932. Their handiwork, St. Emery's Church, is unique, rivaling to some degree ageless European classic art and architecture.

St. Emery, after whom the church is named, was the son of Hungary's first King, St. Stephen (1000-1038). St. Emery died in a hunting accident at the young age

of 24, and thus never ascended to the throne.

The technical qualifications were based on the church's Romanesque Revival architectural form, with a classic bell tower and an exterior enhanced by façade mosaics, arched corbel table décor, medieval church door décors with columned capital pieces, a prominent stained glass paneled "rose" window with original mahogany tracery supports, and abundant belt-course decorative recessed brick motifs.

Qualifications were also based on the magnificent church's interior, with large arched cannon-dome architecture, intricate wall gold leaf décor, the prominent sanctuary frescoes, beautiful nave paintings of religious figures, 130-year old, priceless stained glass windows, imported European sculptures, exquisite marble altars, handcrafted religious bronze wall plaques, rare tapestries, a near century-old operating pipe organ and, most importantly, the history of the American/Hungarian community as it relates to St. Emery's church.

The church began and continued under the Franciscan Order for 79 years! The interior of the church reflects the Founder, St. Francis of Assisi, champion of the poor. The stained glass windows tell the story of St. Francis with Latin inscriptions. European imported statues in the church are those of Franciscan saints. A bronze statue of St. Francis of Assisi and the Wolf of Gubbio resides prominently in front of the church, placed there in 1952 in honor of Friar Benedict Bíró, first Pastor of St. Emery's parish.

The most prominent mural in the church, in the domed sanctuary, is that of St. Stephen (considered the founder of the Hungarian State) and his son St. Emery. It is a copy of a fresco by Lotz Károly, a famous Hungarian artist. During our research we asked, "Where is the original fresco located? Does it still exist?" Thanks to the excellent work of the Magyar News staff,



we found that the original Lotz fresco is still in existence in the Grand Ceremonial Hall in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest, Hungary. (See the story in Magyar News Online, May 2013 issue.)

For a while, the delicate Lady of Hungary ceramic statue (*Patrona Hungariae*), in the southwest transept of St. Emery's church, was thought to be possibly that of the very famous Hungarian terra cotta sculptress Kovács Margit. However, it turned out to be the work of a very talented Hungarian/American ceramic sculptress, Bertha de Hellebranth (1899 -1980). Furthermore, the Lady of Hungary statue, as confirmed in Cardinal Mindszenty's memoirs, is based on his mother's photographic image. (See the stories in Magyar News Online, September 2013 issue.)

### **The Parish History – Its People**

Historically, St. Emery's is an ethnic Hungarian Roman Catholic church and is significant for its association with Hungarian immigrants who settled in Connecticut, starting in the 1880's to early 1920's. Following the First World War, many Hungarian Catholic immigrants settled in Bridgeport's West End suburbs, an area broadly bordered by North Avenue, Park Avenue and South Avenue. It became known as "Hunk Town", and was home to many Hungarian neighborhoods and local businesses, from the 1930's up to the 1970's. Today, Hungarian families still maintain their Magyar language, customs and cultural ties with their homeland. However, in the late 1920's and early 1930's, the West End Hungarian Catholics began to migrate slowly into the nearby suburbs of Fairfield.

The spiritual needs of the Hungarian people living in the West End of Bridgeport were met by St. Stephen of Hungary Church, but the distance and roads made it difficult for people living in Fairfield to attend St. Stephen's. Thus the Church of Saint Emery was founded and built in Fairfield on Kings Highway, in 1932. Kings Highway became known as the "Hungarian High-

way", passing through an amalgam of Hungarian homes and local businesses. Anthony J. DePace, a well-known American architect, designed both the church and rectory, using the Romanesque Revival architectural style. Ground breaking for the church took place on Easter Sunday in 1932. The cornerstone laying ceremony occurred on November 5, 1932 (St. Emery's feast day), and was presided over by the Bishop of the Diocese of Hartford, Maurice M. McAuliffe. It is a great testimony to the determination of the Hungarian people that the church (and rectory) were built during the height of the Great Depression.

Father Benedict Bíró, a Franciscan Friar, became St. Emery's first Pastor, serving for 20 years (1932-1952). The parish was under the auspices of the Franciscan Order until mid-2011. Six Hungarian Pastors were either born in Transylvania or were of Hungarian parentage. In mid-2011, after the Franciscans had withdrawn from St. Emery's because they no longer had the personnel to staff the parish, diocesan priests assumed the pastoral care of St. Emery's. Thus the parish is no longer administered by the Transylvanian Hungarian Franciscan Province.

The parish grew to become the religious, cultural and social epicenter for the largest migration of ethnic groups to settle in Fairfield, Connecticut. Many parish societies and groups were also initially formed under Father Bíró's tutelage and they remained active through the years. In the 1950's, the parish expanded by building and staffing an elementary school and a convent for the Sisters (Daughters of the Divine Charity). The Sisters still occupy the convent. The elementary school closed in 1956, but is now being put to community use by the Fairfield Board of Education as an Alternate High School. The children's Hungarian class of Magyar Studies of America is taught there every other Saturday during the school year.

During Pastor Robert Nemeth's era, a beloved Pastor born in Fairfield who served the longest (21 years – 1977-

1998), significant historic value was added to the church. Among Father Robert's contributions were the acquisition of the priceless stained glass windows obtained from the Franciscan Immaculate Conception Seminary in Troy, New York in 1980, and the de Hellebranth Lady of Hungary ceramic sculpture. Even before being appointed Pastor, Fr. Nemeth was also instrumental in arranging the famous visit of Cardinal Mindszenty's to St. Emery in 1974.

### **The 1956 Hungarian Uprising**

In 1956, the Hungarians rose up against the ruling Soviet Union, becoming the first major threat to Soviet control in Europe since World War II ended in 1945. Many Hungarian refugees immigrated to Fairfield, Connecticut and surrounding areas during that time. Local people took the Hungarian immigrants into their homes until they could find employment and become part of the community. Today, these Hungarian-speaking parishioners attend the only Hungarian language Roman Catholic Mass service in Connecticut.

To this day, Hungarians at St. Emery celebrate October 23<sup>rd</sup>, the beginning of the Revolution, which also became an official day of proclamation in Connecticut in 2006. On May 8, 1974, Cardinal Mindszenty József (1892-1975) of Hungary, world renowned for his steadfast support of Church freedom and for being an opponent of Communism during and after the 1956 uprising, visited St. Emery's. A plaque in front of the church commemorates his visit.

### **The 2000 Interior Restoration**

To celebrate the Millennium, the parish community, under the guidance of Father Louis Pintye (1998-2011), third generation Hungarian-American, undertook the first restoration of the interior of the parish church and sanctuary in 2000. The sanctuary was changed to comply with the restoration of the Liturgy as envisioned by the Second Vatican Council. A new front altar, ambo and baptismal font were imported from Italy. However, the original main altar, on which the Blessed Sacrament is re-

served, remains the focal point of worship. All original frescoes, paintings, and other historically valuable sculptures were fully preserved, with the exception of the Lady of Hungary, which was enhanced with added coloring. The restoration also included modernization modifications to meet fire safety codes, new lighting, facilities, air-conditioning and a handicapped entrance.

## Demographics and Today

Changing times and demographics, and the higher cost of living in Fairfield County, led to an exodus of people seeking to live in more affordable sections of the State. As everywhere else, there has been a shift in the demographics of the parish due to an influx of other ethnicities into the area. Our Parish Community now ministers not only to Hungarians, but to whoever wishes to embrace the Catholic-Christian faith. The church is an integral part of the broad-based ethnic population of the Diocese of Bridgeport community.

Today, the Parish is an active community, with many ongoing social and outreach programs, sponsored by the Parish Advisory Council (15 members) and the Parish Financial Committee (8 members). The St. Emery parish website ([www.stemerys.com](http://www.stemerys.com)) maintains up-to-date coverage of all recent, current and upcoming events.

## Visiting the Church – Welcome

To arrange a special guided visit to St. Emery's unique church, please contact Mary Venturini, Parish Secretary, at (203) 334-0312, or by e-mail at [sse-merstep@aol.com](mailto:sse-merstep@aol.com) (to the attention of Mary), and she will arrange to provide knowledgeable parishioners who were involved in the Connecticut historic nomination process for your visit. St. Emery's Church is open for services Saturday afternoon, starting at 4:30 PM, and Sunday starting at 9:00 AM and again at 11:00 AM. Guided visits can be arranged before and after these services. Please contact Mary Venturini to make your arrangements.

## Epilogue

The St. Emery Historic Place nomination documentation process was a sizeable effort that started in early 2012, beginning with a long research activity to document the historic authenticity of the church. This was complemented by visits to the parish by State Historic Preservation personnel. In mid-2013, the nomination document was submitted to the State of Connecticut's Historic Preservation office for approval. The nomination document was reviewed by the Historic Preservation Council on August 7, 2013 and approved. The Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development formally notified the Diocese of Bridgeport, the Town of Fairfield, First Selectman Michael C. Tetreau, and our parish of the honorary designation on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013.

## Franciscan Friars

Friar Benedict Bíró, O.F.M. (1932-1952)  
Friar Hippolyt Deésy, O.F.M. (1952-1961),  
Friar Dennis A. Szócs, O.F.M. (1961-1976),  
Friar George Mészáros, O.F.M. (1976-1977),  
Friar Robert D. Nemeth, O.F.M. (1977-1998)  
Friar Louis M. Pintye, O.F.M. (1998-2011)

## Acknowledgements

The Historic Place nomination documentation process involved the effort

of many volunteers. Carroll Fencil, Vice President of the St. Emery Parish Advisory Council, inspired and authored the nomination document, seeing it through completion at the State level. Parishioners Henry Kutash is acknowledged for both his photography and extensive research, Chris Bleggi for his photography, Fred Miller for his expertise as an historian and Sandra Schweighoffer for her research assistance. Erika Faber (Editor, Magyar News Online) for her significant research contributions, Reverend Charles Allen S.J. (Fairfield University) for his Latin translation work and Reverend Guido Montanaro (St. Emery's Pastor/Administrator) for his steadfast support of this project. Other parishioner volunteers who assisted in their editing expertise included Marie Kassy, Barbara Chuga, Kathy Sherwood and Barbara Fencil, who was also a valuable assistant and contributor over the course of this yearlong undertaking. This historic designation is an outstanding tribute and honor to all the parishioners and Franciscan clergy who founded and faithfully supported this Roman Catholic parish over the last 80 years.

*For more pictures see the photo gallery.*



# From Bálványosvár to Staten Island

*Olga Vállay Szokolay*

The Apor Family is one of the oldest Hungarian/Transylvanian ones. The ancient family residence, built way back in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, was *Bálványosvár*, in the southeast corner of pre-Trianon Hungary. The word "*bálvány*" means idol, and the name refers to the Apors' alleged ancient Hungarian pagan idolatry even when the majority of the country was already Christian. The hill-top castle has been in ruins for centuries, but its romantic aura attracts many visitors to the present day.

The Apor Family gave some notabilities to the world. The most noted was the writer *Apor Péter* (1676-1752) who was given the title *Báró* (Baron) by King *Károly III.* His best known work, written in Latin, was *Transfiguratio Transilvaniae*, dealing with and bemoaning the changes from "the good old days" to his time...

The 20<sup>th</sup> century hero of the Family – and of the country – was *Blessed Báró Apor Vilmos* (1892-1945), the Bishop of Győr, who died a martyr, shot by a Soviet soldier in his attempt to save Magyar women. He was beatified by Pope John Paul II.

It sometimes crosses my mind that his cousin *István's* daughter, the *Baroness Apor Éva*, would deserve some similar recognition... She grew up in Budapest and during the siege of the city, their apartment building at Margit-körút was destroyed by a bomb, taking the life of 10-year old *Éva's* mother. In those times of want, her destitute father placed the little girl in an orphanage. The country in ruins, food sparse and lives crumbled, the institution was rather Dickensian. *Éva* was bewildered for months until a distant aunt rescued her and with connections, enrolled her in the *Sacré Coeur* boarding school. This was great until *Éva* finished the eighth grade. But then the country was taken over by the Communists. Being related to most historic Hungarian families, *Éva* was considered a "class alien", a stigma used not only to brand aristocrats but many middle class citizens as well. And

the government did not allow *Éva* to enroll in high school. The 14-year old girl was at a cross-roads. She temporarily worked as a "gofer" for a flower shop, but when she once received a tip, her stepmother made her return it. Then she – as so



many others many years her senior in those days – privately learned technical drawing. She was hired as draftsman, then the office tried her out in the field as a surveyors' helper. Her superiors liked her work and she became trained. She lived under very rudimentary conditions, mostly in the country where the jobs were, and supported herself very creditably. Being pretty, lively and smart, *Éva* never suffered for lack of attention by men, and she even turned down suitors. But at age 20 she met a man with Transylvanian roots

who, by age, could have been her father but who was youthful, charming, suave, superbly educated and freshly released from prison. Political prison, that is. A former *Huszár* officer and diplomat, *Báró Bálint* has been known to most as *Charlie*, even in Hungary. They married on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1956. By some accounts, there could have been several hundred collective years of actual or potential political prison terms among the attending crowd in the church at their wedding...

Nobody could have guessed that in a few short months the young couple, along with a few hundred thousand other Hungarians, would be on their way to a new, unknown life, in search of freedom.

Having bypassed linguistically familiar but economically limited Europe, *Éva* and *Charlie* sailed off for America. They started their new life in Tarrytown, New York and in a few years had a son, *Charlie Jr.*, and a daughter, *Edina*. In the early '60s, they moved to Staten Island. *Éva* soon found a job with a surveying office while *Charlie* continued working for Bank of America. *Charlie's* mother managed to come out from Hungary and joined them, helping with the children and the household.

When their children started school, *Éva* began to feel the void in her education. She decided to get a high school diploma. She applied for a GED, finished the requirements, passed the exams with flying colors and received her high school equivalency diploma before her kids did. This earned her quite a few points of deserved respect and admiration.

Over the years, *Éva* gradually became an indispensable pillar at the office. Gaining seniority, she not only knew all the intricate ins and outs of the trade, the clients and the shortcuts, but also provided the office with an endless influx of employees from the pool of eager Hungarian workers. During her 50 years with this company, she facilitated the employment of a total of 40 Magyars, all of whom did exemplary work. At times there were several Hungarians working there simultaneously, audibly chatting in Hungarian while be-



ing busy on the drafting board. A concerned client overheard and asked the boss: "Are they all foreigners?" Whereas the American boss answered: "Oh no, they are Hungarians!"

Charlie and Éva have also been the sustaining pillars of the New York Hungarian House. Charlie had been president for many years, and Éva is still the organizer and cohesive force of the Bridge Club and other socials. That was the place where we celebrated Charlie's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in December, 2011. (See Magyar News Online, January 2012).

An annual Hungarian summer celebration at the Bálintitt house is the outdoor *bogrács-gulyás party*. In their yard by the swimming pool, behind the house, Éva sets up several tables with umbrellas: some square ones for the bridge players, some round ones for the chatters where 101 ½-year old Charlie presides. Guests from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut start to filter in after 1 pm. Lunch is served, featuring Éva's famous "*körözött*" (that orange-colored Hungarian spread of cream cheese, paprika and other goodies, with a fresh touch of dill !) and French salad (a veggie-pickle-apple-mayo delight), among other dishes.

Wine, beer, cocktails are self-serve. Meanwhile Edina, her ex, George Vitadamo and friend Margó Attl start working on the fire pit over which the kettle (*bogrács*) for the *gulyás* is hung. Margó adds her magic touch and secret ingredients. The few hours of fresh air, bridge games, conversation and drinking ultimately work up a new appetite in all. The smoky smell of the simmering stew adds to the expectation. The unique flavor certainly beats an indoor meal and compensates for the stubborn smoke in one's hair.

This time the bridge players were: the Hostess; Cséry Lajkó, his darling wife, Liz, and their 8-year old son, Lajos; Joe Sagan and myself. In the lively conversation group was the Host, accompanied by Ferencz Magda, Koréh Katica, Sándor István, Berényi Zsolt, Charlie Jr. and his lovely wife, Lily. Some of the four

grandchildren: Niki, Stephanie and Vincent drifted in and out, entertaining Lajos when he tired of playing cards. Only Vanessa was missing.

The weather was balmy, though windy – not conducive for swimming as it was in some previous years. But, as always,



*Bálványosvár*

the sun was up, the sky was blue, 'twas beautiful (and so were you, dear Prudence?...for you fellow Beatles fans...) We still believe Éva keeps some secret contact with Uncle Vili who uses his celestial influence on those up there in charge of the weather...

Éva is still going strong. Still working at the surveying office three days a week keeps her active in the non-domestic area. At home, she cooks endlessly to satisfy the insatiable appetites of Edina's family living upstairs. Edina, on the other hand, paints the house, tends the garden, builds, repairs, and exercises, maintaining her beautifully sculpted body.

A devout Catholic, Éva lives her religion every day. Whether family or strangers, whoever is in need locally or in Transylvania, she is there to help. Although not a millionaire, she is one of the most generous persons I've ever known. She is someone to count on for assistance with lodgings, gratuities, transportation or – now hear this! – even funeral arrangements... often without gratitude, receiving criticism instead. But there is no malice in her heart. On principle, she doesn't waste any of her abundant energy on hatred. Éva is a true friend who would give you the shirt off her

back.

With her sunny disposition and great sense of humor she sails through all rough waters life abundantly offers. We all wish her many more years to light up our lives!

*Olga Vállay Szokolay is an architect and Professor Emerita of Norwalk Community College, after three decades of teaching. She is a member of the Editorial Board of Magyar News Online.*

## Snapshots: Torockó – Where the Sun Comes Up Twice

The Székely village of Torockó is located south of Kolozsvár, in the Aranyos River Valley. It lies between two mountains: Székelykő and Ordaskő. A fortress on top of Székelykő defended the area as early as the 13th century against Tartar incursions. Today, even most of the ruins of the fortress have disappeared. The numerous caves in the mountains served as refuge for the inhabitants of Torockó in time of invasion and war.

Every morning, the sun rises behind Székelykő, only to disappear again behind the crags. From the village, it then seems to rise for a second time – a quirk of geography.

The area is rich in iron deposits and iron mining was carried on by even the pre-Roman inhabitants of the region. Hungarian kings settled some German miners from Upper Austria in Torockó, before the Mongolian invasion of 1241-42. Later, Székelys settled there as well. Iron working provided the livelihood for the people, and they also washed out some gold from the aptly named Aranyos River. Under the rule of János Zsigmond, Prince of Transylvania from 1559 to 1571, who himself was a proponent of Unitarianism, the people of Torockó adopted his new creed. The church is an 18th century „fortress church”, which could serve as refuge for the

inhabitants in time of attack.

The village was destroyed by fire several times: by the Austrians in 1704, by Rumanian peasants in the Hora-Kloska revolt of 1784, and it was burned again in 1870. The white-washed houses on the main square were built after this last conflagration.

Torockó is famous for its distinctive folk costumes. The closing chapters of Jókai Mór's novel *Egy az Isten* („God is One” – which is the Unitarian creed) are set in Torockó. The village is a Székely cultural center. In 1999, Torockó was awarded the international *Europa Nostra* prize for cultural preservation.

*(photos by Zsuzsa Lengyel and Erika Papp Faber)*

## Chestnut purée (gesztenye püré)

2 ¼ lbs chestnuts  
1 ¾ cups confectioner's sugar  
4 ¼ cups milk  
1 vanilla bean  
1-2 tbsp rum  
1 2/3 whipping cream

Cook the chestnuts for a few minutes in boiling water and drain. Peel the chestnuts. Dissolve the sugar in the milk, add the vanilla bean and cook the chestnuts in it until soft. Remove the chestnuts, pass them through a sieve, and beat in the rum until smooth.

Whip the cream until stiff.. Transfer half of it into a large glass bowl, or divide between 5 or 6 dessert dishes. Force the chestnut mixture, which has been enriched with rum, through a potato press, then spoon it over the whipped cream and decorate by piping the remaining cream into rosettes.

The dessert is also often decorated with sour cherries, which have been either frozen or soaked in rum.



*Left: Székelykő Mountain behind Torockó, Street in Torockó, Typical Embroidery Right: Unitarian Church of Torockó, painted cabinets in the folk museum*



*Chestnut*



*Chestnut purée*



## Did you know...

... that the water tower's reinforced concrete structure on *Margit sziget* was considered a revolutionary novelty when it was built between 1909 and 1911? It was designed by Zielinszky Szilárd and Ray Rezső to provide water for the parks and buildings on the island.

The tower is 57 meters in height. The hall under the cupola is 27 meters high, and offers a spectacular panoramic view of the island and of Budapest proper. The water storage tank was at a height of 33 meters.

An outdoor theater was built next to the tower in 1938. Lighting for the stage was provided from the tower. After 1962, the tower ceased to be used for water storage, and the water tank was removed in 1983. However, it was declared a protected landmark. Since 1986, it has been used for exhibits and is open during the summer months.



*Water tower on Margit Island*

### **Magyar News Online**

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*Water tower on Margit Island*

## **It`s a small world/Kicsi a világ!**

Desi Bognar

During my first trip to Africa, a friend of mine from San Diego and I would go out to the swimming pool at Lagos' (Nigeria) Ikeja Airport. There were two basic reasons for this: 1) It was a fabulous swimming pool, and 2) that's where the stewardesses used to go.

One day I had just swum across the pool, and as I stepped out of the water, a tall, graying gentleman called out, "Ugye maga magyar?" (You're Hungarian, aren't you?) I looked at him in surprise, because I had not said a single word in Hungarian, and replied, "Igen, de honnan gondolja?" (Yes, but why do you think so?) He replied: "You can recognize a Hungarian from the way he swims and the way he looks at women.

The man had attended the Toldi high school in Budapest and had been a Boy Scout under the leadership of Tábori Pál. In Lagos, he was the Honorary Commercial Attaché of Ethiopia!  
Small world???

*Desi Bognar was among the group of nine Hungarian refugee students in Boston in the fifties and sixties who set up the Outsider Club, with the purpose of getting to know various peoples, cultures and traditions. He has lectured and made films in many countries around the world, and is currently considering setting up a club for real cosmopolitans.*