

The Canadian-American

REVIEW

of Hungarian Studies

The State of Education in Hungary on
the Eve of the Battle of Mohács (1526)

L.S. DOMONKOS

Travel Reports on Hungarian
Settlements in Canada, 1905-1928

PAUL BODY

Count István Tisza and the
Preservation of the Old Order

GABOR VERMES

Horthy, Hitler and
the Hungary of 1944

PETER GOSZTONY

Travel Reports on Hungarian Settlements In Canada, 1905-1928*

Paul Bódy

Historical investigations of early Hungarian settlements in Canada have made relatively little use of a valuable contemporary source: reports by travellers who have observed early immigrant life and recorded their impressions. This paper seeks to illustrate the richness and value of these sources by commenting on the most noteworthy travel reports on Hungarian settlements.

The first published commentary and also the most significant report on the early Hungarian settlements is contained in the travel notes of Reverend Peter A. Vay.¹ The author was a high-ranking church dignitary (apostolic protonary and titular bishop), a missionary, and a noted interpreter of Oriental art who had visited China, Korea, Japan, Siberia and North America. Vay's general background and, especially, his broad knowledge of Asiatic and American cultures, make him a qualified commentator not only on immigrant settlements but also on Canadian society in 1905, the time of his visit to the young Dominion. What makes Vay's travel notes even more useful and interesting is their spontaneous and unfinished form: his report consists of personal comments and reflections recorded during his journey. These notes and observations provide many insights into the lives of immigrants to Canada and serve as a suggestive commentary on Canadian social and political life at the turn of the century.

On arrival in Canada, Vay paid brief visits to Quebec City and Montreal. From here he proceeded to Ottawa where he was received by notables of Canadian public life including Governor General Lord Grey, Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir Thomas Shaughnessy, the President of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company.

In the Canadian capital Vay had hoped to obtain information concerning the Hungarian settlements of Western Canada, but his inquiries apparently yielded no definite results. He was advised to go

*The preparation of this article was made possible through a research grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board, New York City.

on to Winnipeg where he would find the necessary directions. Vay's own explanation of this remarkable situation best conveys the state of knowledge in Ottawa concerning Hungarian immigrants:

From Ottawa I struck out to the prairies in order to visit the Hungarians. No one could give me definite information. I was told merely that in Winnipeg I would receive further assistance. Therefore I went on to Winnipeg. The journey lasted two days and two nights with the Canadian Pacific.

On his arrival in Winnipeg, Vay was greeted by a crowd of several hundred flag-waving and cheering Hungarians. He made good use of his stay in this growing centre of immigrant life in Canada. As the Archbishop's guest, he visited religious, cultural and social institutions and managed to obtain information on the Hungarian community of Winnipeg. He also attended receptions given by Sir Daniel H. Macmillan, the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, and by the Manitoba Club. Vay's contacts provided him with excellent opportunities for gaining valuable glimpses into Canadian social and political life as the following remarks on his visit to the Manitoba Club suggest:

...the Manitoba Club sponsored a reception. I was frankly surprised to see this tastefully constructed and well-appointed building. It impressed me in every respect as a first-class club. The members were of serious bearing and well-mannered. As I noted, this is considered important and considerable efforts are made to create a cultured English impression.

No doubt, English influence is on the decline in Canada. English domination has ended a long time ago. The citizens of Canada consider their country a sovereign nation. Even more dangerous is the fact that the influence of the United States is gaining ground everywhere. Especially in the Western provinces, people, institutions, and ideas are characterized by Yankee traits.³

During his Winnipeg visit, Reverend Vay received detailed information on the location of the oldest Hungarian settlements in Saskatchewan. His main purpose had been to visit these communities. From Winnipeg Vay travelled to Kaposvar and Esterhazy, the two main centres of Hungarian settlement in the Canadian West. There he was received with joy by the local settlers as the first Hungarian clergyman to visit them. The event was celebrated with traditional religious ceremonies and community festivities. It was attended by local residents as well as settlers from the more distant, newer Hungarian settlements. Reverend Vay had ample opportunities to obtain information on the situation of the Hungarian colonists of Saskatchewan. Following his visit to Esterhazy and Kaposvar, he spent some time in the more recently established Hungarian communities north of Regina.

Vay's impression of the Hungarian colonies are highly interesting. In his view, the settlements were prosperous and

successful pioneer communities. He recognized that their general well-being was the accomplishment of those settlers who had come to Canada since the mid-1880's and had transformed the wild prairies into prosperous farming communities through years of persistence and strenuous effort. The hardships that the early colonists had faced throughout the years had been rewarded through the establishment of prosperous communities. According to Vay, a sense of satisfaction and achievement characterized the general attitude of the Hungarian settlers.

Reverend Vay also commented on the process of assimilation which he saw taking place among the immigrants of the Canadian West. He believed that the establishment of successful farming communities was an essential part of the transformation of newcomers from Central and Eastern Europe into Canadian citizens. According to him this transformation was especially evident in the change of personal values and psychological attitudes of the immigrants. Vay saw a difference in the speed with which the process of Canadianization worked among the various ethnic groups. He thought that Slavic and German immigrants adapted to Canadian ways more rapidly than Hungarians who tended to cling to their language and customs longer. At the same time Vay observed that second-generation Hungarians had generally adopted Canadian habits and attitudes.

Reverend Vay's travel notes also provide interesting information on Hungarian miners and construction workers in Canada at the time of his visit. He had visited Lethbridge and the Crow's-nest Pass area of Alberta where many Hungarians worked in local coal-mines. In Lethbridge, the Hungarian miners were generally satisfied, but in the Crow's-nest Pass region the situation was different. There, working conditions were unsafe, mine accidents frequent, and the immigrant workers dissatisfied and disillusioned. Vay's comments on this region are reminiscent of reports on industrial conditions in nineteenth century England:

Even if no explosions take place, the region is dark and mournful. Bleak. I have never seen a darker, bleaker region. The shafts are placed along the narrow ridge, chimney after chimney...all vomiting black suffocating smoke. Our unfortunate emigrated compatriots! They feel deeply the bleak atmosphere of this saddening landscape. They are full of complaints. But what can they do? Here they have earnings to secure their living. They would gladly return home at any time . . . But none of them will ever return . . .

A brief visit to Niagara Falls gave Vay another glimpse of the life of Hungarian workers in Canada. Near the famous cataract, Hungarian immigrants were employed in the construction of a hydro-electric power station. Here, too, accidents were frequent

among the workers, most of whom were involved in dangerous tunnelling and underground blasting operations.

Aside from these and other sketches of Hungarian immigrant life, Vay's travel notes contain reflections on Canada. An entire chapter of his work is devoted to an analysis of political and social developments in the country. As the most dramatic feature of the young dominion he singled out the construction of a national railway system which in turn was making the colonization of Western Canada possible. In discussing the Canadian settler, Vay made an interesting observation. He felt that Canadian pioneer's outlook on life was an important ingredient of the emerging Canadian cultural and social milieu. This outlook Vay defined as a dedication to the settlement of Canada and an awareness of the value of the European heritage. He considered this attitude a sharp contrast to the unbridled materialism of the United States and a promising foundation for the development of Canadian culture. But Vay was aware of the dangers inherent in the influx of large masses of immigrants to the Canadian West. His impressions of Canadian society and his feelings of apprehension regarding the continued survival and growth of a distinct Canadian culture are conveyed by the following passage:

Cultural development in Canada follows the traditions of England and not those of America Man has not yet completely become a machine, life does not exclusively mean drudgery. The distribution of work and leisure is more proportional. And above all the value of gold is not as overestimated, the struggle for money not yet desperate.

In short, the moral aspects of life are not yet completely sacrificed to material purposes. Feelings are not completely destroyed by the struggle for existence, or more correctly for well-being. The family, the home, the nation are still ideals of happiness. Love, responsibility, loyalty are still influential.

The continuously increasing immigration and rapid development make the preservation of high ideas and ideals difficult. The danger is especially acute that among the mixed populations of the Western territories the old traditions and social customs will not flourish to the extent that they do in the Eastern provinces. Briefly, I mean the danger that the so-called Americanism or materialism will conquer the new generation.⁵

Another highly interesting report on the early settlers can be found in the public reports and unpublished papers of Ferenc Hoffmann. The author was a professor of economics at the Agricultural Academy of Kassa whom the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture had sent to North America to study agricultural and horticultural technology. His first trip was to the United States and Mexico in 1907. His second, lasting from March, 1909 to June, 1910, was devoted completely to Canada. Hoffmann's unpublished reports and published articles are based on the impressions and information he gained during his visits.⁶

Of primary interest to the present discussion is his Canadian trip and his recorded observations. In the initial phase of his Canadian visit he established contacts with leading authorities in the field of agriculture in Montreal and Ottawa. He visited the Macdonald Agricultural Academy in St. Anne de Bellevue near Montreal and received detailed information from its director, I.W. Robertson. He also made the acquaintance of G.T. Bell, a member of the board of the Grand Trunk Railway System. In Ottawa he received assistance from the Federal Minister of Agriculture, Sydney Fisher, and William Saunders, the Director of the Central Experimental Farm. These contacts not only provided him with information on Canadian agricultural technology, but facilitated the second important purpose of his trip: the study of Hungarian settlements in Western Canada.⁷

Ferenc Hoffmann first encountered Hungarian immigrants in Winnipeg, where he observed the arrival and settlement of new immigrants. His observations are summarized in an article published in Hungary following his return.⁸ Noteworthy is the author's vivid description of scenes of Hungarian immigrants arriving at Immigrant Hall. Hoffmann also gave an account of the immigrants' first Canadian impressions. In the course of their journey via CPR trains to Winnipeg, they noted the practicality of kitchen facilities and adjustable sleeping beds. On arrival, they were escorted into temporary quarters in Immigration Hall and offered warm showers and meals cooked by native Hungarian peasant chefs. All this made a profound impression on peasants who were not at all accustomed to such treatment. In another observation the author referred to the instinctive tendency of new arrivals to remain attached to fellow-immigrants hailing from their native village or nearby districts. Hoffmann interpreted this behaviour as a natural defense mechanism of the peasant immigrant in the face of the strange Canadian society. Furthermore, he noted this pattern of association generally formed the basis of group settlements on the Saskatchewan prairies, not only because of the importance of relating to a familiar community, but also because frequently immigrants coming from a certain region of Hungary had similar social-economic status. Thus immigrants from northeastern Hungary were generally destitute, while those from western and southern Hungary possessed modest financial resources.

Perhaps the most interesting point of Hoffmann's report is the discussion of Hungarian immigrant settlement.⁹ He noted two general types of settlement. The first was homestead farming on the Saskatchewan plains. This course was open to those who possessed financial resources sufficient for the purchase of farm implements and farm animals. The second was the occupation of forested homesteads, usually near Winnipeg, where forest clearing provided basic main-

tenance until such time as the capital required for homestead farming was in hand. Those lacking financial resources usually chose this course. Hoffmann noted that the majority of newcomers belonged to this group.

The first type of settlement usually evolved in the following manner. After the selection of a homestead, a rudimentary shelter was built: a large tent, mud or wooden structure. Later permanent farm buildings were erected. Since no significant income could be expected in the first three years, the settler and his family sought employment in nearby towns during the winter. After the first three years of farming, the homestead was usually well-developed and provided sufficient income for the maintenance of the family.

The second type was quite different. The settler, having no funds of his own, first had to obtain temporary employment in Winnipeg through the assistance of the immigration office. From his earnings he purchased the bare necessities which enabled him to occupy a forested homestead. These included a pair of axes, a saw, food for five or six days and a railway ticket to his destination, usually Spurgo or Woodridge. After his arrival, he selected an available homestead and began clearing the forest. Usually he shipped lumber to Winnipeg, but he could also sell it to the local merchant, who made handsome profits on the transaction. As the forest was cleared, an area was prepared for planting. Initially garden vegetables were planted, later they were replaced with grain. Poultry and other farm animals were kept. Fishing and hunting of caribou and moose provided supplementary sources of income.

Hoffmann reported that, although the second type of settlement did provide basic maintenance, the settler was easily discouraged by the slow progress made in clearing the land. As a result, it was a frequent practice to sell these homesteads after three years of occupancy. These sales constituted, in effect, the real earnings of the homestead farmer for three years of hard work. Comparing the average sale price of these homesteads with the average earnings of industrial workers in the United States, the author concluded that the Canadian immigrant was generally better off than an American immigrant worker. Consequently, argued Hoffmann, the Hungarian immigrant to Canada ought to be considered as a temporary resident, comparable to the immigrants in the United States who intended to return to Hungary after saving a certain amount of money.

Another point related by Hoffmann is an account of his conversations with J. Bruce Walker, the Commissioner of Immigration in Winnipeg. The Canadian official was favorably impressed with the ability of the Hungarian immigrant to adjust to the simplicities of pioneer life. Walker explained to his visitor that the Hungarian

immigrant was especially adept in bearing the hardships of homestead settlement. He also stressed the ability of immigrants to organize a traditional way of life within the confines of a farm and home constructed by themselves. Hungarian settlers, furthermore, were known in Western Canada for their strong attachment to the land. Finally, the Commissioner praised Hungarian immigrants for their judgement and knowledge of land suitable for farming. On the latter point Walker's comments are worth quoting:

He examines the soil by touring the forests and prairies for days and weeks, testing soil conditions. He observes the location of trees and the condition of haygrass. He seeks out gentle slopes to facilitate the flow of water. He prefers areas with air passage, especially in forested areas, because they decrease the danger of frost. Because of these extraordinary perceptions of farming, Hungarian settlers are frequently chosen as guides of new colonists.¹⁰

The Commissioner of Immigration also had some critical comments on the Hungarian immigrant. He thought that Hungarians were strongly attached to native customs and resisted the adoption of Canadian ways. As a result of these attitudes, the Hungarian immigrant made very slow progress in learning English. The Commissioner added that the Canadian government wished to assist the immigrant in spite of these objectionable traits. Such assistance took the form of reduced rail fares, emergency relief, lumber grants from crownlands, job assistance and free medical care. This policy was designed to foster confidence between the immigrant and the Canadian government. In the words of the Commissioner, "The nearer the government comes to the immigrant, the nearer the immigrant comes to the government. It makes him a better citizen."

Hoffman generally agreed with this assessment of the Hungarian peasant immigrant. In his view, the Hungarian peasant continued his traditional way of life in Canada. In the new environment he constructed log houses covered by a thatched or wooden roof. His family wore clothing traditionally worn in Hungary. New winter clothing was prepared from furs obtained through hunting in Canada. Food was prepared essentially in the Hungarian style, with the exception that tea and coffee were now consumed in great quantities. Such a life-style seemed simple in contrast to modern Canadian customs, but for the Hungarian peasant it represented an advantageous blend of Hungarian tradition and Canadian economic opportunity. Concerning the traditional attitudes of the Hungarian immigrant Hoffmann remarked that immigrants who came to Canada directly from Hungary exhibited a very strong attachment to traditions. He noted that the acquisition of the English language was naturally difficult given the circumstances of pioneer life. He

mentioned two specific causes of the Hungarian immigrants' indifference to Canadian society: first, the lack of adequate religious leadership and pastoral care for the Hungarian communities, and second, the fact that more Hungarian immigrants planned to return to Hungary after several years of Canadian residence.¹¹ His assessment of this question is summarized in the following manner:

Settlers coming from the old country will always remain strangers to Canadian society. Children of school age learn English in Canadian schools. Even in Hungarian communities no more than two hours per week of Hungarian language instruction are available. These include the townships of Otthon, Bekevar, Kaposvar, Esterhazy, Szekelyfold, Matyasfold, Howell and Estevan. In mixed settlements children can learn Hungarian only at the expense of their parents. In the family, Hungarian is spoken at all times, but in mixed settlements English is used outside the family circle.¹²

These brief references to the Canadian reports of Ferenc Hoffmann illustrate their value as source materials on Hungarian immigrant life. They are particularly interesting as evaluations of the social attitudes of Hungarian immigrants at the time of their entry into Canadian society. In addition, they provide a contemporary viewpoint on the complex process of transition from traditional European society to modernized Canadian ways. It would be therefore desirable to make the unpublished reports of Ferenc Hoffmann available to researchers in the field of immigration and ethnic history.

The third report on Hungarians in Canada to be discussed in this paper is the comprehensive travel commentary of the Hungarian journalist, Ödön Paizs.¹³ The author had toured Canada in 1928 with the specific purpose of discovering and reporting on the Canadian-Hungarian communities. The publication can best be described as a high-quality journalistic report of Hungarian immigrant life in 1928. Its value as an historical record can be seen in its portrayal of Hungarian immigrants at a critical stage of the history of Canadian immigration: at a time when agrarian settlements had already reached their peak and the beginnings of urban immigrant life could be observed. The report focuses on those issues which played prominent roles for Hungarian immigrants at that date: the stability of the established Western settlements, the transience of urban immigrants and the attitudes of the Canadian government toward these highly disparate segments of immigrant society.

The most important theme of the author is the early phase of urban life among Hungarian immigrants in Canada. The clarification of this complex social process required in the first place an assessment of the predominantly rural Hungarian settlements and their role in subsequent urbanization. According to Paizs, Hungarian immigrants in 1928 were predominantly residents of rural Saskatchewan. Only a

fraction of Hungarians were urbanized and settlement outside of Saskatchewan was insignificant and of recent origin. In view of the concentration of Hungarian immigrants in Western Canada, the towns and cities located in the West became the earliest centres of Hungarian urban life. Paizs discussed especially the roles of Winnipeg and Lethbridge as immigrant urban centres. He noted that Hungarian settlement in Winnipeg dated back to the turn of the century. Nevertheless a permanent Hungarian community emerged only after 1925. The author considered important in this respect the formation of Hungarian community organizations, Hungarian churches and of a small group of urban professionals of Hungarian descent. In spite of these encouraging signs of an immigrant urban population, however, the author remarked that Winnipeg's Hungarian population belongs essentially to an unstable, transient labour force seeking employment or moving on to other regions. Winnipeg was therefore primarily a transit station for Hungarians in 1928.

Lethbridge had also been an established centre of Hungarian immigrants. The first to settle there were miners, previously employed in Eastern United States mines, who, according to Paizs' information, arrived in Lethbridge in 1893. Later, others joined them and obtained employment in the coal mines. At the time of the report, the Lethbridge Hungarian community numbered about 100 families. Lethbridge constituted, however, not so much an urban centre, but primarily an industrial concentration located in a rural environment. As a result, no significant urbanization or population growth was expected there.

More important as potential urban immigrant centres were the cities of Eastern Canada. But in 1928 only the beginnings of an urban immigrant population could be observed here as well. Toronto, according to the Hungarian report, was a transit station for Hungarian immigrants. Only a very small group of permanently established merchants, tradesmen or workers of Hungarian descent resided in the city. Oshawa offered employment to a small group of skilled automobile workers. Paizs considered Hamilton the real centre of Hungarian urban life in Eastern Canada. At the time of his visit approximately 1,500 Hungarians lived there. The core of the Hungarian population was a substantial group of skilled and unskilled workers. Furthermore, an active social and cultural life flourished among Hungarian immigrants. The author noted particularly the roles of musical and literary programs, the presence of Hungarian community groups and the sponsorship of English language classes for immigrants. Significantly, one of the two Hungarian newspapers in Canada at the time was published in Hamilton: the *Kanadai Magyar Népszava* [Canadian Hungarian Voice of the People].

These sketches of immigrant communities are supplemented by a series of contemporary personal statements, obtained by the author in the course of his Canadian tour, concerning the first phase of immigrant urbanization in Canada. They consist in the first place of personal interviews with Canadian civil servants and political notables. They illustrate by way of verbatim citations the firm policy of the Canadian government to admit only those immigrants who were willing to accept employment on farms. They also refer to specific statistical and economic data on the substantial numbers of immigrants who were primarily interested in urban-industrial employment. As a result of the large-scale attempts to evade official Canadian immigration policies, Canadian immigration officials tended, understandably, to regard the new, industrially-oriented immigrants with disfavor. The personal statements cited by the Hungarian reporter provide interesting and detailed information on these themes. Another series of personal testimonies provide information of the viewpoints of established Hungarian settlers respecting the new Hungarian immigrants arriving in Canada in the 1920's. Interestingly these statements indicate that the old immigrants regarded the new arrivals in much the same light as did Canadian immigration officials. The newcomers appear in these personal records as more or less troublesome transients, deeply affected by experiences in World War I and the subsequent revolutionary movements, who seemed unwilling to adjust to Canadian society. The author gave the following assessment of the new immigration, based on his extensive discussions with Canadians and Hungarian immigrants:

The majority of the new Hungarians do not come to Canada to settle permanently as the old immigrants; they come here to make money and then to return home. For this reason, they do not settle down, they do not establish new Hungarian colonies. The new Hungarian settlements are at best transit stations. Their only reason for existence is that jobs are more abundant there than elsewhere and therefore it is better to spend the time of employment there.¹⁴

The report of Oton Paizs provides a glimpse of Hungarian immigrant life at the time of the early formation of immigrant urbanization. For this reason it makes a worthwhile contribution to the history of Canadian immigrant groups as well as to our understanding of Canadian urban history. The two reports of Vay and Hoffmann discussed earlier are concerned with an equally important aspect of Canadian immigrant life, the analysis of immigrant social attitudes at the time of their entry into modern Canadian society. The latter reports contribute therefore to the prehistory of those social and ethnic influences which have played a significant role in the emergence of present day Canadian ethnic societies. In view of their value as

records of immigrant social attitudes, the reports discussed in this paper ought to be considered as informative sources for an understanding of contemporary Canadian social history.

NOTES

1. A. P. Vay, *Amerikai naplókivonatok. Utijegyzetek. Levéltskédek* [American Diary Excerpts. Travel Notes. Letter Fragments] (Budapest, 1910).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.
6. Hoffmann published three articles in Hungarian journals concerning his American and Canadian experiences: "A magyar telepésekről" [Concerning Hungarian settlers], *Magyar Gazdák Szemléje* [Hungarian Smallholders' Review], Vol. XVI (February 1911), pp. 129-133; "Az amerikai kivándorlás újabb iránya" [The new direction of emigration to America], *Pesti Hírlap*, August 20, 1910; and "Tapasztalatok a jelen és jövő kivándorlásának színhelyéről" [Observations concerning the place of present and future emigration], *Pesti Hírlap*, November 20, 1910. Of the three, the first article is the most substantial. Hoffmann's most detailed account of his travels is contained in two reports submitted by him to the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture. Both are accessible to scholarly research in the Hungarian National Archives. His report on his American tour is dated January 25, 1908 and is located in the following collection: Földművelésügyi Minisztérium, Eln. K-178, 1908-5859, Magyar Országos Levéltár [Hungarian National Archives], Budapest. His report on the Canadian tour is dated July 14, 1910, and is entitled "Dr. Hoffmann Ferencz kassai m. kir. gazdasági akad. s. tanár jelentése kanadai közgazdasági tanulmány utjáról 1909. március - 1910 június-ig." Földművelésügyi Minisztérium, Eln. K-178, 1911-3749, Magyar Országos Levéltár. Hereafter this latter report will be referred to as "Canadian Report, OL."
7. Canadian Report, OL.
8. Hoffmann, "A magyar telepésekről," pp. 129-133.
9. *Ibid.* For a more detailed discussion see the Canadian Report, OL.
10. Hoffmann, "A magyar telepésekről," p. 131.
11. Canadian Report, OL.
12. Hoffmann, "A magyar telepésekről," p. 131.
13. Ödön Paizs, *Magyarok Kanadában* [Hungarians in Canada] (Budapest, 1928).
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.