



**Published by the Forest History Association of British Columbia**

**No. 82**

**Victoria, British Columbia**

**May 2007**

#### **MEETING ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The FHABC Executive is planning our 2007 AGM for the second or third Saturday of September, at Kamloops. This will give members in the southern Interior the opportunity to attend an AGM and for those from elsewhere to visit or revisit the area and learn about its history. Details are being worked out and will be provided in the summer newsletter.

A 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Sopron – UBC Alumni Celebration to recognize the arrival of the Sopron University of Forestry at UBC in February 1957 will be held from June 14 - 16 at UBC. It will include a faculty open house; displays and photos; traditional Hungarian food, music and dance; a scientific - professional symposium; alumni reception and concert; plus a Hungarian banquet.

The event is being organized and hosted by the Faculty of Forestry at UBC. If you would like more information please contact Sandra Schinnerl at 604-822-9627 or e-mail [sandra.schinnerl@ubc.ca](mailto:sandra.schinnerl@ubc.ca)

Additional information is online at <http://www.forestry.ubc.ca/sopron>



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**THE SOPRON DIVISION OF THE FACULTY OF FORESTRY**  
**by Prof. Antal Kozak**  
**Department of Forest Resources Management, UBC**

Since the mid-1960s, the phrase “Hungarian Mafia” has often been jokingly used in forestry circles in British Columbia. This is not surprising, since close to 100 Hungarian professional foresters found employment in this province during the late 1950s and early 1960s. They worked in a variety of forestry and forest engineering jobs, and many of them rapidly elevated into influential positions. The phrase “Mafia” is used because a special bond, a family-like relationship, developed between these young Hungarian foresters as they were trying to shape their careers in unique and sometimes rather difficult situations.

What was unique about their situation? Well, to understand this, we will briefly review the history of the Hungarian Forestry School, located in Sopron; the migration of about half of this school to the University of British Columbia; and last but not least, the influence of the graduates on British Columbia’s forestry practices.

The history of forestry education in Hungary dates back to 1809, when forestry was added to the existing Academy of Mining in Selmechánya, an old mining town (now in Slovakia). The language of instruction was German until 1867, when it became Hungarian. In 1918 the birth of Czechoslovakia was announced, and the Czech troops invaded the northern part of Hungary where Selmechánya was located. As these events made the future of the School of Mining and Forestry in Selmechánya unpredictable, professors and students migrated to Budapest, and shortly thereafter, in March 1919, to Sopron, which is still the home of this, close to 200-year-old, forestry school.

Events of the 1956 revolution in Sopron were different from many other parts of Hungary since no Soviet troops were nearby. As in other cities with universities, the Student Revolutionary Committee took over the local municipal government, and played an important role in running the day-to-day activities of the city. Also, a large number of students were involved in organizing shipments of food, medicine, blood, and other supplies from Sopron to Budapest. These items were brought to Sopron from Austria by the Red Cross.

On November 4, Janos Kadar formed a new government, and asked Nikolai Bulganin, the Soviet leader at the time, to use force to stop the revolution. Within hours, Soviet troops began to invade Budapest and several other cities. Attempts to resist the approaching Soviet tanks in Sopron were futile. About 450 students and 50 professors and their families left Sopron, fleeing across the open border to Austria. Of these, about 250 were from the forestry school. This was not a planned departure. It happened quickly as the events of November 1956 unfolded.

In Austria, Kalman Roller, the dean of the Faculty of Forestry, did everything he could to keep the group together, and to provide them with a suitable situation so that our studies could be continued until we returned to Hungary. Yes, the majority of students and faculty felt that when the Hungarian situation became settled, with western help (we were hoping), we would return to Sopron.

When it became clear that the Hungarian Forestry School could not stay in Austria permanently, Dean Roller sent letters to twenty countries explaining the situation. While several countries expressed interest in us, Canada's response was the most promising. The Faculty of Forestry at the University of British Columbia offered to "adopt" the Sopron University of Forestry and guarantee its maintenance for five years until the current students graduated. They also guaranteed that the education would be continued in Hungarian, gradually phasing in English courses given by UBC professors.

Many Soproners felt uneasy about going so far away, because they still felt that their emigration from Hungary would only be temporary. After several lengthy debates, a large proportion of the students and faculty members decided to accept Canada's offer. While some returned to Sopron, and others stayed in Europe to continue their studies, 14 faculty members and 200 students left for Canada on January 1, 1957 to establish the new school, the Sopron Division of the Faculty of Forestry at UBC. After short stops in St. John, New Brunswick and Abbotsford, the group settled in Powell River for "conditioning" – studying English and learning the Canadian ways of life.

The first academic year began at UBC in September 1957 and was naturally a most difficult period for both students and faculty. Classes scheduled in old army huts in "night shifts" were resented by both students and faculty. Some of us even felt that our invitation was considered a mistake by the university authorities. In hindsight, there were no reasons for this feeling. On the contrary, there were many signs which pointed to the helpfulness and generosity of our hosts. There was only one barrier between the hosts and guests – the language. In the end, small misunderstandings brought about some good results. They created a determination among Soproners and helped to develop a special family-like relationship between them. Credit is due to Dean Kalman Roller, Dean George Allen (of the Faculty of Forestry), and President Norman MacKenzie for their commitment and dedication to make this difficult situation work.

By May 1961 the last class had graduated from the Sopron Division to make the total number of graduates 141. It is interesting to note that, as of December 1966, 80.1% of the graduates were resident in Canada, 15.6% in the United States, and 4.3% in Europe. About 32% obtained a post-graduate degree, an unusually high proportion by North American standards.

The influence of Hungarian graduates on North American, Canadian, and especially B.C.'s forestry practices is rather difficult to evaluate. For those who work in research or education, and there are many, the number of publications and books written would probably be a good measure to survey and evaluate their contributions.

For those who work in practical forestry, for companies, government, or consulting firms, the evaluation is much more difficult. However, if we examine the changes that occurred in B.C. forestry practices between the early 1960's up until now, we notice a significant change for the better. No, there is no scientific proof that 100 or so Hungarian foresters played an important role in these changes, but we would like to believe that they did.

The Sopron Forestry School exodus was a unique emigration, unparalleled in history. A significant portion of a university left a country, while another country adopted them, so that they could continue on with their education in their own language. A total of 70% of them graduated, and most of the graduates had very successful careers. I would leave you with a quote from Dr. G. C. Andrew, Assistant to the President of UBC in 1957, who wrote in the early 1980's: "I have always looked at their (Soproners) arrival in Canada, and particularly B.C., as one of the most profitable immigration dividends the country has had."



### **FIFTY YEARS ON by Joseph Bako**

Living in Canada has been so good, I blinked and half a century sped by. I came to British Columbia as a member of the Sopron forestry group in early 1957 after the 1956 Hungarian uprising against Soviet domination; a repressive, one-party, communist regime; and an inept, centrally-planned economy. At the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our arrival perhaps a few personal observations on our background and on whether or not Canada and the Sopron group have been a good fit might be of interest.

First, a brief background. In the ninth century A.D., the Hungarians – calling themselves Magyars – migrated west from the Russian steppe. In 896, they crossed the Carpathian Mountains, rode into the Carpathian Basin of the Danube River valley and stayed. In 1896, Hungary observed the 1,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that arrival. In 2001, the country celebrated a millennium of existence as an organized European state.

Only the reckless would have bet on Hungary surviving for a thousand years. Neither Teutonic, Slavic, or Latin like the nations around them, the Magyars were a Finno-Ugric tribe of nomadic, pagan warriors, herdsman, tradesmen, and craftspeople planting itself in the middle of settled, ordered, Christian Europe. Fortunately, perceptive national leaders realized that the only way to hang on to this fertile and blessed patch of Europe was to become European. Prince Geza (940 - 997) and his son, St. Stephen (975 - 1038), Hungary's first king (1001 - 1038) had invited in western missionaries, knights, and farmers to help settle the Magyars down to Christianity, feudalism, and agriculture.

Despite the promising start, foreign invasions (Mongol, Turkish, Austrian, and Soviet) kept interrupting periods of peace and prosperity. Each time, though, the country had re-emerged bruised and battered but nationally, culturally, and linguistically intact. With the West preoccupied at Suez, the Soviet leadership sensed a free hand and crushed the revolution by the end of 1956. Still, the uprising turned out to be an important and inspiring milestone on the road to communism's collapse. The country progressed from brutal post-1956 reprisals to "gulyas communism" in the 1980s, to full-fledged democracy in the 1990s, and membership in NATO and the European Union.

Forestry has deep traditions in Hungary. In the days of St. Stephen, about 70% of the country was covered with forests. Early on, forestry consisted of managing feudal game reserves, and providing lumber and firewood for aristocratic estates. Higher education in forest engineering started at Selmecebánya in 1808. A new Forest Act stressing silviculture was enacted in 1872. After World War I, the country lost about two-thirds of its land area, including the heavily forested Carpathian Mountains and Transylvania (see “1919” by Margaret MacMillan). Hungary’s forested area dropped to about 12% overnight. Selmecebánya fell under Czechoslovakian jurisdiction and the university relocated to the city of Sopron in western Hungary. After World War I, concerted efforts brought the forested area back to about 19%, mostly by reforesting marginal farmland, and afforesting sand dunes and sodic soils on Hungary’s Great Plain.

Hungarian forest policies rested on the principles of sustained yield and intensive forest management. Development planning was based on detailed forest and land inventory, including stand typing that also considered plant associations and indicator plants (a forerunner of biogeoclimatic classification). Harvesting included both selective- and clear-cutting methods and near complete utilization of wood. Silvicultural practices were based on site specifics, and included natural and artificial reforestation, new growth management (brushing, spacing, pruning, thinning, etc.), tree improvement, and forest protection. Wildlife, game management and fish farming were also in the forester’s bailiwick. The manufacturing sector included lumber, value-added products, and pulp and paper. Research extended to all phases of silviculture and wood science.

Some 200,000 Hungarians – about two percent of the population – fled our homeland. The luckiest of us ended up in this magnificent country of Canada. The exodus included most of the students and teaching staff of the University of Sopron, including its School of Forest Engineering. We learned in Austrian refugee camps that Canada was prepared to accept the Sopron forestry group *en masse* as the Sopron Division of the Faculty of Forestry at UBC. We were overjoyed and excited. We knew a great deal about Canada from high school geography, books, lexicons, and the media, and liked what we knew. We were aware of such geographic features as the Great Lakes, the Prairies, the arctic tundra, and the Rockies, and cities like Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. We knew that Canada, a democracy within the British Commonwealth, was a developed, industrialized nation with a European, predominantly British, culture and value system. The forest industry played a prominent role in its economy. We figured we would fit right in.

The train journey from St. John, New Brunswick to Vancouver left us in complete awe of the country’s geographic expanse and regal grandeur. After overwintering in Powell River and summer jobs in the woods (I worked as a snag faller) we took up our studies at UBC in the fall of 1957.

Fitting in was easier than first thought. We found here in spades what we so reluctantly left behind in Hungary: a great land and a great people. Of course, at first we looked European, talked funny, and encountered questions about the wisdom of letting us in. However, the Canadian values of good citizenship, family, hard work, Christianity, parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy were familiar concepts to us.

The blessings here included personal freedom and free enterprise. We found Canadians a pioneering, hardy people – energetic, generous, optimistic, and forward-looking. Hockey turned out to be a splendid substitute for soccer. That left wrestling the English language to the ground as our most urgent task.

The timing of our arrival was fortuitous. Forestry in B.C. was about to assume muscular importance. Two recent reports by the Sloan Royal Commissions just recommended sustained yield, intensive forest management, area-based forest tenures, and private sector management of public forests. The recommendations made eminent sense to us. By the mid-1960s there was plenty of work in forest and land inventory, tenure applications and administration, development and logging planning, forest engineering, timber harvesting, silviculture, forest protection, and developing forest policy both in the private sector and the Forest Service.

Although we were particularly impressed by the splendid corps of B.C. foresters, we wondered about some forest practices. These included too liberal utilization standards, excessive reliance on natural regeneration that tended to delay new stand establishment and produce a less desirable species mix, and a paucity of second-growth management activities (brushing, spacing, pruning, commercial thinning, etc.). Most of these concerns were neatly resolved by linking the AAC of a tenure to stocked hectareage, volume growth per hectare, and improved utilization standards. On the other hand, we were most impressed with B.C.'s tree improvement program, the mechanization and efficiency of logging and milling operations, and of course, Dr. Krajina beat us to the biogeoclimatic classification of the province's forests.

What happened to us in fifty years? About two hundred Sopron forestry students came to UBC. Of these 141 graduated, about 47 chose other professions (engineering, medicine, biology, the arts, etc.) and about 12 returned to Hungary. Tony Kozak developed some numbers on the disposition of the graduates. Of the 141 graduates 89 stayed in B.C., 24 settled in the rest of Canada, 20 went to the U.S., seven to Europe, and one to Australia. Of the 141 graduates, 44 obtained post-graduate degrees, including 20 Ph.Ds. As far as I know, all of us have completed satisfying careers as professionals, managers, executives, civil servants, consultants, academics, researchers, and/or entrepreneurs. Marriage, mostly to Canadians or Hungarians, has produced second and third generations born here.

Thanking those in government, industry, academia, and the public who helped us would take far more time and space than I have. However, we remain eternally grateful to God and Canada for our good fortune. While leaving the land of our birth was extremely traumatic at the time, living in Canada turned out to be like a happy second marriage after a nasty divorce forced upon us. I hope and trust that we have been able to reciprocate by being loyal, responsible, productive, and proud citizens.



## NEWS ITEMS

### “BIG MOTHER” FELLED BY WINDSTORM

One of Canada’s largest known western redcedars succumbed to the winter winds of January, 2007. The tree was on Lemmens Inlet, Meares Island and was possibly as old as 1,000 years. It is now on its side, exposing a rootwad 4 m tall and more than that wide.

Wayne Barnes, a photographer from Tofino, found the downed tree while clearing a trail. “If you could have seen my face. My attention was down on the trail and I just turned to look and it’s gone.”

Barnes regularly visited the tree, an hour’s paddle by kayak from Tofino. Barnes’ neighbour, Adrian Dorst, found the tree more than 20 years ago and nicknamed it “Big Mother.” Dorst contacted big tree researcher Robert Van Pelt, who measured it with a laser and calculated its volume to be 293 cubic metres or 10,350 cubic feet. Al Carder, another big tree enthusiast, noted Big Mother’s height as 50.9 metres and DBH as 5.54 metres in 1987.

“It’s not very tall, but very few trees top 10,000 cubic feet,” said Dorst. Van Pelt ranked Big Mother as the second-largest western redcedar in B.C. It is thought that the tree blew down on January 9, when strong north winds were recorded. The tree leaned to the south and so was more vulnerable to a north wind.

### MARTIN MARS WATER BOMBERS PURCHASED

In November 2006, TimberWest announced that the two Martin Mars waterbombers were for sale. The company, the sole operator since 2001 when Weyerhaeuser removed their financial support, could no longer support the high operating costs. TimberWest spent about \$1 million annually to maintain the unique aircraft, the world’s largest operational flying boats, much admired for more than 46 years of firefighting.

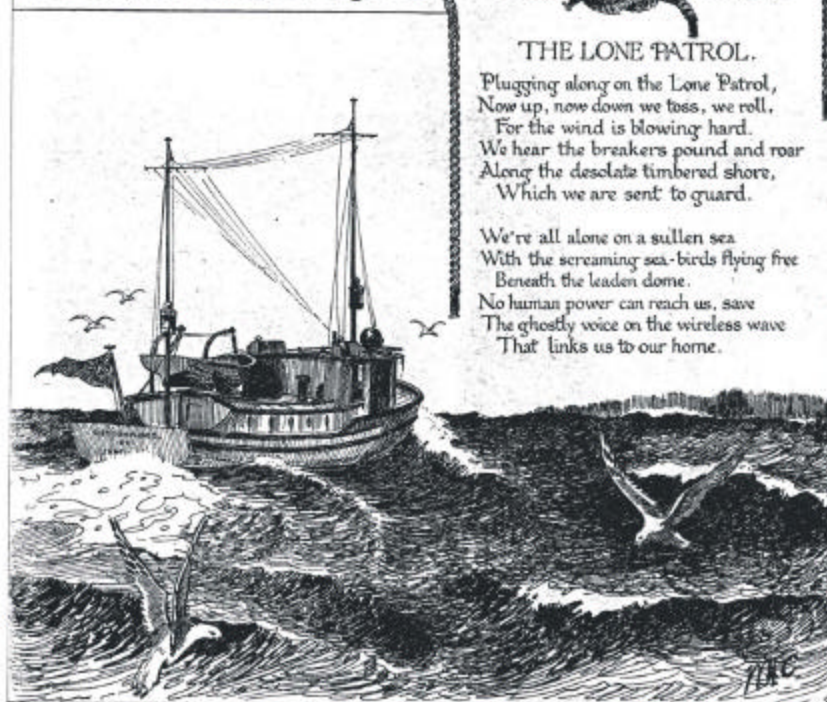
The bombers are staying at their Sproat Lake base, near Port Alberni, and will be owned and operated by the Coulson Group of Companies thanks to a deal finalized on April 13. The crew of 22 who maintain the aircraft waited anxiously for months to find out if the new owner would keep the planes flying or put them in a museum. TimberWest made it a condition of sale that one would be donated to the city of Port Alberni once the aircraft are retired.

Flying Tankers Manager Terry Dixon said “The main thing is the planes will stay for a while and Coulson intends to operate them. They are too young for museums.”





VOL.1, No 7. NOV. 1922



THE LONE PATROL.

Plugging along on the Lone Patrol,  
Now up, now down we toss, we roll,  
For the wind is blowing hard.  
We hear the breakers pound and roar  
Along the desolate timbered shore,  
Which we are sent to guard.

We're all alone on a sullen sea  
With the screaming sea-birds flying free  
Beneath the leaden dome.  
No human power can reach us, save  
The ghostly voice on the wireless wave  
That links us to our home.

This newsletter is the official organ of the Forest History Association of British Columbia. Please submit newsletter material and send changes of address to the Editor: John Parminter, # 3 – 130 Niagara Street, Victoria BC V8V 1E9 Phone (250) 384-5642 home or (250) 356-6810 office. E-mail: [jvparminter@telus.net](mailto:jvparminter@telus.net)

Membership in the association is \$10 yearly, or \$45 for five years. Please send dues to the Treasurer: Art Walker, 564 Oliver Street, Victoria BC V8S 4W3 Phone: (250) 598-4455 E-mail: [jaws564@telus.net](mailto:jaws564@telus.net)

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