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## AHEA Newsletter: November 2022

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**American Hungarian Educators Association** <aheanews@gmail.com>

Tue, Nov 8, 2022 at 11:16 AM

Reply-To: aheanews@gmail.com

To: voros@eecs.berkeley.edu

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# November 2022 Newsletter

## President's Corner

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Dear American Hungarian Educators Association (AHEA) Members and Colleagues,

I trust and hope that the autumn finds you well.

The Board of Directors is planning an in-person conference April 27-29, 2023 in Hamden, CT at Quinnipiac University. We invite all who have interest in Hungarian studies to join us at this conference. It promises to be a great one! We will have engaging conversations, consider the latest research, ponder new ideas, and discuss ways to improve our research and teaching. We invite paper presentations, workshops, panel and roundtable discussions, and book presentations. The [Call for Abstracts](#) is available and submission is open online until January 13, 2023.

Additionally, next Spring we will hold elections for AHEA's officers and board of directors. In the interest of transparency, here's what our standing rules say about elections:

*The Nominating Committee Chair (Judith Kesserű Némethy; [jn2@nyu.edu](mailto:jn2@nyu.edu)) shall draw up a slate of candidates for all fiduciary positions and shall submit it to the President sixty calendar days (by February 28) prior to the next annual meeting of the Association, who forwards it to the Membership. Additional nominations may be made at this time in writing by any ten voting members of the Association, if received by the President at least forty calendar days (by March 20) prior to the announced date of the annual meeting (on April 29). The Nominating Committee Chair shall make sure that those eligible are placed on the ballot.*

*At least thirty calendar days before the annual meeting (March 30), the Nominating Committee Chair shall send the electronic ballots to all members eligible to vote. Ballots*

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*are to be returned within fifteen calendar days and be counted by the Nominating Committee. Ballots are forwarded upon receipt by the Webmaster to the two members of an independent Tellers Committee who verify and count the ballots and report the results to the members of the Nominating Committee. The two members of the Tellers Committee shall be chosen by the President from members not running for office or currently in office. They can be members of the Nominating Committee.*

We invite you to renew your membership so that you have a voice in these elections. Let us hear from you if you have comments or questions about AHEA's Board or these procedures.

Please reach out if you have comments or suggestions on how AHEA might better support your career advancement.

With best wishes for your good health and continued success,

Klára Papp, PhD  
President, AHEA  
[klarakpapp@gmail.com](mailto:klarakpapp@gmail.com)

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## Membership Renewal Drive

As we approach the end of the year and look forward to both the next conference and our association's next elections, it is more vital than ever to renew your membership for 2023.

- Only members in good standing can vote in leadership elections;
- Your dues enable you to access “Members Only” section of the website;
- Your annual contribution to AHEA not only helps fund our conferences, but allows us to support your colleagues through our range of [awards and scholarships](#)

 [Click here to renew through a convenient PayPal link!](#) 

## Member Spotlight

AHEA is a scholarly organization connecting a diverse set of educators, researchers, professionals, independent scholars and academics who come from many walks of life. Each month we highlight the academic and professional career of a different AHEA member.

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This month's featured member is **James P. Niessen**,  
President of AHEA 2014-2018

**Please tell us a little bit about your career arc.**

Fascination with Transylvania drew me into Hungarian Studies by a circuitous route. Anton Schwob, a medieval literature scholar from the Voivodina, taught an Austrian history course in the Notre Dame Innsbruck program I attended in 1972-73, then after my return to campus I discovered the works of Keith Hitchins. To pursue my fascination I needed a graduate program where I could also learn Hungarian and Romanian, and chose Indiana University. Alongside languages, I imbibed the comparative approach to East European history of Charles and Barbara Jelavich. When György Ránki assumed the Hungarian Chair at IU, he and Denis Sinor became my primary advisors. With the support of IREX, I spent two years in Hungary and Romania in 1982-84 to pursue my research on Transylvania in the 1860s. Wonderful assistance by a pair of advisors in each country were vital to the success of my project: Péter Hanák and Ambrus Miskolczy in Hungary, and Stefan Pascu and Simion Retegan in Romania. They also gave me affiliation with the history institutes in Budapest and Cluj/Kolozsvár, two very collaborative environments that helped form my research methodology and critical appreciation of Hungarian and Romanian historiography. I had access to state and church archives in these countries and also in Vienna, and during the writing phase enjoyed an exchange semester in Debrecen. After the fall of Communism I returned to Budapest with two grants from the Európa Intézet.

My 1989 dissertation and many subsequent works are freely available in the Rutgers repository. My publications of the next years focused on the Romanian national movement and church history, including an article in the Budapest journal *Regió: Kisebbségtudományi Szemle* on ethnic assimilation in Transylvania and in the *Catholic Historical Review* on the Hungarian Greek Catholic diocese of Hajdúdorog. After three years of teaching I decided to get a library degree and found employment as Librarian for History and Foreign Languages at Texas Tech University in Lubbock. I was awarded tenure there, but then took a better job at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey as World History Librarian in 2001. For my tenure packet at Rutgers I shifted my research focus to library history. The best product of this period was a comparative history of Transylvania's three "national libraries" that came out in 2006.

**How did you come to specialize in the history of refugees and emigrés? How did you find out about AHEA, and what led you to join?**

Not long after my promotion at Rutgers I took on added responsibility for one year as sabbatical replacement for Paul Hanebrink directing the university's Institute for Hungarian Studies (IHS). The University Librarian stipulated that I raise the visibility of our library within the Hungarian Studies community by finding a related resource that we could digitize. Fortunately, I was aware that we had some records of the President's Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief in the papers of Rutgers alumnus and trustee Tracy Voorhees. This committee provided supervision from

Washington, DC of the reception of 56ers at Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. I had learned about this material after being contacted by a researcher who knew about it before I did—I think it was Tibor Glant from Debrecen, whom I met in New Jersey in 2006. Rutgers digitized two boxes of papers (the bulk of the committee records are in the Eisenhower Library in Kansas) and made them available online. The digital display is very simple: each folder of the papers is its own .pdf file. This library site links to related resources that I assembled on the website of the IHS.

I had never worked in American history, but it was clear that what we digitized of the Voorhees Papers was very rich material and the story of the 56er refugees was worth pursuing. I had casual contact with 56ers thru my attendance at Hungarian events in New Brunswick, and realized that their experiences were all unique. It was about 2008 that I discovered AHEA as I was looking for scholars with a personal and research interest in the 56ers. My first paper at an AHEA conference was in library history, though. At the 2010 conference in Szeged I gave a paper on Károly Szabó's bibliographic work leading to the publication of his *Old Hungarian Library*. My first paper on the 56ers was the next year at our meeting in Cleveland. In the beginning I focused on Camp Kilmer, but soon I was exploring relevant archives of the US government, the United Nations in New York and Geneva, and Austrian, Hungarian, and German archives. Less than one-fifth of the 56ers ended up in the US, so this was a truly international story. Some of this work, like my *God Brought the Hungarians*, reflects my continuing interest in religious history. Contact with Gusztáv Kecskés soon drew me into his network of 56er specialists, mostly in Hungary. I've provided stylistic editing and English translations for many works by Hungarian scholars in this field.

**What impact has your involvement with AHEA made on your career and/or your work?**

I have life memberships in other organizations, but with the passage of time AHEA became my primary scholarly affiliation outside my day job in the Rutgers University Libraries. In 2013 Paul Hanebrink and I co-organized the AHEA conference at Rutgers in New Brunswick, and the next year I was honored to receive an invitation to succeed Julia Bock as AHEA president and served two terms in this role. I've continued to present new research on the 56ers at the annual conferences. It's been very satisfying to find interested audiences for my research, stimulating comments, and a channel for open access publication in our journal, *Hungarian Cultural Studies*, *HCS*. It's nice to find many new friends and colleagues in this community though my ethnic background is not Hungarian.

Two other highlights of my four years as president were attendance at the Hungarian Diaspora Council in Budapest and presiding over our conference in Cluj-Kolozsvár in 2015. The Orbán government organized the Council as a focus for its outreach to Hungarians living abroad. The all-expenses paid invitation of an AHEA representative for several days each year may in retrospect have been a misunderstanding of the nature of AHEA since we were one of the few scholarly organizations to be invited. The word *educator* in our name seems to have created the impression that we had a strong engagement with the organization of Hungarian language teaching; this would justify our attendance, since Hungarian schools in diaspora communities were of great interest to the Council. Another focus of the Council was one on which I did engage energetically and on which I gave a report at one of our conferences that was published in *HCS*, the "repatriation" to Hungary of the archives of diaspora Hungarians and their organizations. I pointed out that many of these archives were created in the host country and were part of the history of the diaspora community and broader society in that country. I was aware that this question must also consider the financial difficulty of maintaining archives where they were created. Digitization may be an answer, such as for the newspapers in the American Hungarian Foundation that recently became available. Let us hope that they continue to be freely available and do not retreat behind a paywall. Attendance at the Council meetings brought me together with many interesting people; the food and excursions were spectacular, and I was able to spend some time in the archives in Budapest, too.

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The conference in Cluj-Kolozsvár brought me back to a town and region where I had

spent a very intense year during the era of Ceaușescu thirty years earlier. Our gracious hosts at the Babeș-Bolyai University and the Hungarian Cultural Society of Transylvania and excellent presenters ensured that the program was enlightening and memorable. The organizing talent and *joie de vivre* of Kálmán Magyar was vital to the success of our subsequent bus excursion around Transylvania. I lobbied for stops at three of the key religious places of memory of the region: the birthplace of Bishop Áron Márton in Csíkszentdomokos, the church center of the Romanian Greek Catholics in Blaj-Balázsfalva, and the Roman Catholic cathedral in Alba Iulia-Gyulaféhervár. Archbishop György Jakubinyi, an acquaintance of my months in the city years earlier, kindly shared his time and knowledge in a detailed tour of his cathedral.

### **Tell us, please, about your current projects.**

The theme of our forthcoming conference in Quinipiac, *Dependencies and Alliances*, is ideal for a reconsideration of the relationship of Hungarian and Romanian Catholics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Habsburg dynasty and ties to the Holy See created both dependencies and alliances that my dissertation explored at length. The still relatively fresh experiences of Communist rule and leading ecclesiastical figures invite comparison and contrast to the earlier period.

I'm not done with the 56er refugees either. At our 2022 conference I gave a paper on the meeting of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1956. I will continue to investigate this topic with particular focus on the opening of the border fence as an initiative of the Hungarian government and a theme of the WCC meeting that was a precondition for the exodus of the refugees after the revolution. The Pan-European Picnic of 1989 and its commemoration in a [recent Hungarian film](#) demonstrate the lasting significance of the border fence for Hungarian history and society.

*Please see Jim's recent contribution to Hungarian Cultural Studies, "The Meaning of Jewish-Catholic Encounter in the Austrian Refugee Camps" (2022): <https://doi.org/10.5195/ahca.2022.467>*

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## **Member Publications**

The listing of publications is for our members' information and does not signify endorsement by AHEA.

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**Paul Sohar** announces a third edition of his co-authored volume of creative nonfiction:

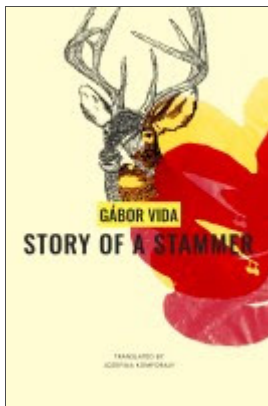
Ferenc Aladár Györgyey and Paul Sohar: *True Tales of a Fictitious Spy*. (Iniquity Press/Vendetta Books, 2022). Available from Amazon, the publisher, and the co-author Paul Sohar.

"Ferenc Aladár Györgyey, a former political prisoner (between 1948-1956) takes a satirical look at the Stalinist prison camp system in Soviet-occupied Hungary through a series of misadventures which he recounts with uniquely Central European irony, giving his creative nonfiction a surrealist tone: Kafka meets Solzhenitsyn as the antihero Ferenc Aladár Györgyey presents his own version of Ivan Denisovich in this Hungarian gulag grotesquerie, recorded in fragmentary stories for an exiled Hungarian literary journal in the early 1960s. His collaborator—not political but literary—is Paul Sohar who lived through the same era although in the wider prison encompassing the whole of Hungary, which he escaped in 1956, at the same time as Aladár. They met some fifty years later by which time Sohar had turned himself into a minor American poet and writer, better known

for his translations of Hungarian poetry. He was asked not only to translate Aladár's collection of short stories about his prison years but arrange them in chronological order and add connective text to them, the continuity of a book. It was hard work, but Aladár was very satisfied with the result. "This is exactly as I would've written it," was his pronouncement. The book is more than just a footnote to Hungarian history; it provides verbal illustrations to an era sorely lacking in documentation. The book is in its third edition now but it has remained the same except for the bio notes as some of the dramatis personae have passed away, including the self-confessed antihero."

**Jozefina Komporaly** would like to call attention to two recent publications. First: a special issue of the Australian AALITRA Review, which focuses on less translated languages and has three articles on Hungarian, including contributions by Mark Baczoni, Ágnes Orzóy and Jozefina Komporaly, which range from case studies of translation practice and testimonials to academic discussions:

Second: her translation of Gábor Vida's *Story of a Stammer* [*Egy dadogás története*], has been published by Seagull Books. From the publisher's website:



"In the novel *Story of a Stammer*, Gábor Vida asks a fundamental question: Where does stammering come from? In the process of answering this question, he discovers that an entire historical period and an entire world have been stammering, too. Through Vida's eyes, we see that stammering comprises all the lies accumulated over time and over generations because nobody had ever articulated what they felt or thought, nor done what they really wanted. Nobody, Vida shows, had ever told the truth.

Describing life in the 1970s and '80s under Romanian Communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's authoritarian regime, Vida writes with disarming honesty, breaking taboos and chronicling the ways in which tyranny and exploitation seep into family relationships. The novel charts the first two decades of a young Hungarian man's life in Romania, telling a story of coming to terms with a stammer, loneliness, and an unstimulating environment where religion, alcoholism, and suicide are the most common escape strategies. A Bildungsroman, a novel about Transylvania, a chronicle of minority life, a sociological analysis of cultural identity, and ultimately a deeply personal account of a historical era, *Story of a Stammer* is a major contribution to contemporary Hungarian literature—an unflinching yet humorously delightful witness to a turbulent period in recent history."

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## Have a New or Upcoming Publication?

We would love to help share news of the impressive and diverse work that AHEA members are doing! If you have a recent book, article, or other scholarly/artistic work you would like your fellow members to know about, send a brief description/promotional blurb and a link to further information to [ahenews@gmail.com](mailto:ahenews@gmail.com). Requests will appear in the order in which they were received and may be edited for space.

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