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## April 2025 Newsletter

### President's Corner

Dear Members and Friends of AHEA,

With more than 100 presenters, we're gearing up for an exciting conference in June! If you are presenting, please remember to register by filling out the forms on the conference website. **The deadline to register is TODAY, April 15.**

Site: <https://sites.google.com/stmarys-ca.edu/2025aheaconference/2024>

As you make your travel plans, I'd like to encourage you to attend the entire conference and not just one day or your own panel. Participating fully demonstrates mutual courtesy and intellectual curiosity—values that are part of our professional culture. Moreover, attending the full event offers opportunities for networking, learning, and engaging with diverse perspectives across our field. You can also invite colleagues, friends and family, just have them register as visitors through our website.

I'm also excited to announce our new Best Student Paper Award, sponsored by the AHEA Board. Applications for this new award are due on May 15, 2025, through the form on the conference website.

If you are a student or an early career scholar within 10 years of receiving your degree, consider joining our [Early Career Network](#). We plan to offer a special networking event for this group in Pécs. Thank you to Prof. Sarah Lucas for working on this new award and network!

The application deadline for our two scholarship awards (\$2500 each) is a bit earlier, on May 1, 2025, so mark your calendars now and start putting your materials together.

Join us also for a three-day excursion on June 22-24 to explore the area around Pécs. This will be a great opportunity to connect with colleagues in a more informal setting and all are welcome, first come first serve.

All details and registration links are available on the [conference website](#).

Finally, whether you are presenting at this year's conference or not, remember that our international, peer-reviewed journal, [Hungarian Cultural Studies](#), accepts manuscripts throughout the year.

As always, feel free to reach out to me personally with any questions or suggestions: [hl4@stmarys-ca.edu](mailto:hl4@stmarys-ca.edu).

Warm regards, üdvözlettel,  
Helga Lenart-Cheng

### A Message to our Members in Hungary: Connect with American Fulbright Scholars!

Want to meet with US Fulbrighters at your University or in your area? Please let us know and we will send you the contact information and background of scholars going there. You can then get in touch with them for coffee, networking, etc.

We are setting up a list of AHEA members who are open to this initiative. This has worked well Hungarian Fulbright scholars coming to the USA.

We appreciate your help and many thanks!

If interested, please contact:

Enikő Molnár Basa  
[eniko.basa@verizon.net](mailto:eniko.basa@verizon.net)  
AHEA founder and former Executive Director

### 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.



This month's featured member is **George Deak**, independent scholar

**Please tell us a little bit about your career arc. In particular, how did you go from history to software development and back again?**

I guess you could say I've had many interests, but only with a moderate amount of talent in each. I've always enjoyed both math and history. I attended Stuyvesant High School in New York City, what you would call a STEM school today, and started my college career at M.I.T. During my freshman year, the Vietnam War was raging, Martin Luther King was assassinated, I heard Cassius Clay (later known as Muhammad Ali), and Noam Chomsky speak on campus. I found that I was more

graduate of the University of Chicago, where I got my BA in History. As a Hungarian Jew who emigrated to New York with my parents in 1957 at the age of nine, I thought that I would study the history of Renaissance Italy or the French Revolution. The Holocaust, which my parents had experienced and in which I had lost a brother (whom I never got to know) seemed too horrible, too personal even for someone who wanted to understand the world. Still, a professor at Chicago, Peter Novick, steered me to Hungarian history since I spoke Hungarian. At his recommendation I ended up working on my PhD at Columbia with István Deák. I found that Hungarian history was fascinating and, as my ability to read Hungarian academic and literary texts improved, it became even more so. I was fortunate enough to be able to spend a year in Hungary on an IREX/Fulbright fellowship in 1976-77 and to work with wonderful historians in Budapest like Zsuzsa L. Nagy. During her time as a visiting scholar at Columbia, Nagy suggested to me that I write my dissertation on the National Association of Hungarian Manufacturers (GyOSz). Péter Hanák, an expert in Dualism, helped me with the research and interpretation of the early period of the organization. I defended my dissertation in 1979.

I had also gotten married in Hungary to Vera Lampert, a music historian and Bartók specialist. We returned to the States, more precisely, to Florida, because my parents had moved there from New York and because life was cheaper there. We soon had children. Jobs for historians were few, and for historians of Hungary, probably non-existent. On the other hand, I noticed that the Miami Herald had page after page of job ads for computer programmers. So, I took a course in programming and very soon found a job at a Fort Lauderdale company that designed and manufactured specialized computers for the oil industry. The salary was good, so I stayed in the computer field for 30 years, becoming an expert in interfacing logic design with the physical design of printed circuit boards. We moved from Florida to Framingham, MA, partly to continue my career at another computer company, but also for cultural reasons. I enjoyed growing with the field of computer technology, learning computer language after computer language, though after a while, as printed circuit boards "went out of fashion," it became less satisfying. This was especially so once I went into management, with all the politics that it sometimes entails. I read a lot of history in my free time and longed to get back into working in and with historians. My only outlet for doing so was through a book club of the University of Chicago Alumni Association in Boston. As a side job, I also taught programming for a while at a technical school. At one point I was asked to teach a course on world cultures, to replace a teacher who had left. I loved it, and after starting a somewhat dull new job as an IT manager, I applied on a lark to the University of Massachusetts at Lowell for an adjunct position to teach Modern World History. After a semester I was also asked to teach an online course in Russian History. A few years later, I retired from the computer field. By then, I was 62.

My reading in Russian history and my interest in Hungarian history led me to read something that had been on my mental list since graduate school: Ervin Sinkó's *Optimisták* [Optimists], which had been republished in Hungary by Noran Libro press in 2014. I thought the English-speaking world should know about Sinkó, whose failed idealism was sadly typical of so many of the best minds of Europe. The novel helped me understand why so many middle-class Jews who wished to assimilate, but who were rejected by the dominant culture, were attracted to communism. But *Optimisták* was too long, and, according to the publishers to whom I pitched it, not of interest to non-Hungarian speakers in the US. On the other hand, there was interest in Sinkó's *Egy regény regénye* [The Novel of a Novel], about his failed attempt to publish *Optimisták* in Moscow in 1935-37. (He was lucky to get out alive.)

At an American Historical Association conference in Boston in 2011, I met fellow presenters, Virág Rab and Zsuzsanna Agora, who were also from my hometown of Pécs. They seemed instinctively to understand my suppressed intellectual interest and helped me get oriented to the work being done on the history of the Holocaust in that city. I was introduced to the work of Mariann Nagy, who had written a pamphlet on the history of the Jews in Pécs in connection with a permanent exhibit she had curated in the Pécs synagogue. I translated that pamphlet, *Együtt éltünk, együtt élünk* [We Lived Together, We Live Together], into English and we published it with the help of the Tom Lantos Foundation. That is what led me to the life of Lajos Esztergár, the war-time mayor of Pécs, an enigmatic, ambiguous figure after whom a street and many institutions were named after 1990. His work in social policy during the 1930s and early 1940s is celebrated by these memorials. Meanwhile his collaboration with the Germans in the deportation of the city's Jews (among whom were my mother and my only brother, Andrew, who never returned) is either explained away or not mentioned at all in the works that promoted Esztergár's fame. It took me some time to be able to deal with my family's history without becoming bogged down by sentiment and later to deal with Esztergár's history in an impartial way. But I find the effort to immerse myself in that history to have been worthwhile, because it demonstrates how a basically humane person like Esztergár can become corrupted by a nationalist ideology, to confine his humanity to only one group, and to participate in what we now know as the Holocaust. Looking at the world today, it seems that the same disease has infected the Right in Israel, which I find very sad.

#### How did you find out about AHEA, and what brought you to join?

An acquaintance, Susan Glanz, called my attention to the AHEA conferences. But since I was still wrapped up in my IT career and teaching activities, I did not participate. When I started working on the Sinkó translation and was looking for a publisher, István Deák put me in touch with Peter Pastor, whom I had already met back in the 1970s. Our friendship from the 1970s was renewed and deepened. At Peter's urging, I wrote some book reviews in *Hungarian Cultural Studies* and published an article on Sinkó there as well. It was also through Deák that I met Paul Olcsaváry. I was enjoying our work together on the journal and am saddened by his untimely death.

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

Peter Pastor and Lujza Vasvári helped me a great deal in getting my historian's writing skills back on track. I was eager to present my translation of Sinkó's *The Novel of a Novel* and to discuss my thoughts about his fascinating life at an AHEA conference. I found a warm and welcoming intellectual community there and have made many new friends.

#### Tell us, please, what you're working on right now.

On a trip to the archives in Pécs last year, I found some interesting private letters from Esztergár to his friends written around the time that he was collaborating on the deportations. I hope these will clarify his negative attitudes towards Jews during the war. I will be presenting these at the AHEA conference and am writing an article about them as well.

I have also been working on a translation of a book by Tamás Stark, a researcher at the Hungarian Institute of History in Budapest, whom I met through AHEA. His book *Hosszú út az első magyarországi deportáláshoz* [The Long History to Hungary's First Deportation], published last year by HUN-REN. It is about the prejudices and myths developed after World War I and which helped lead to the 1941 deportation of approximately 22,000 Jews—deemed to be foreign nationals—from Hungary. The months-long action resulted in the murder of most of the deportees by German police and military forces in Kamianets-Podolskyi in western Ukraine, and to much suffering even by the survivors. With all its differences, the topic has some relevance to the deportations going on or being proposed in some parts of the world today—for example in Myanmar, Gaza, and the United States. The book, besides being a meticulous analysis of how the deportations came about, how they led to so many deaths, and the later regrets of some—though by far not all of the actors—also shows how such actions, based on prejudice and misrepresentation of facts, can lead to tragic, sometimes unintended consequences.

## Member Announcements

This third-party announcement is included for the benefit of our readers. AHEA is not directly affiliated with the institution described below.

**Carol Rounds** of Columbia University (New York, USA) wishes to pass on the following announcement:

limited cases with permission. If you or anyone you know is interested, please have them contact me directly. Thank you!!"

Carol Rounds  
Columbia University  
518 Hamilton Hall  
New York, NY 10027

## Member Publications

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

**László Kürti** (University of Miskolc) announces the publication of the following volume, co-edited with **Sabrina Ramet** (Norwegian University of Science & Technology): *Civic and Uncivic Values in Hungary: Value Transformation, Politics, and Religion* (Routledge, 2025).

From the publisher's website: "Following the proposition that civic values are crucial to liberal democracy and conducive to international peace, this book examines the extent to which these values are respected and practised in a number of policy spheres, with chapters devoted to the political system, the media, religion, relations with the European Union, history textbooks, cinema, Roma, and the attitudes of Hungarian women voters. The book also charts how, under Prime Minister Orbán, Hungary has gravitated away from the civic values spelled out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Charter of the European Union. This book will prove to be of great use to scholars and students of democracy, East Central Europe, minorities, Hungarian contemporary history and politics, civic culture, gender studies, nationalism, human rights, and more broadly the social sciences."



## 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 [aheanews@gmail.com](mailto:aheanews@gmail.com). Requests will appear in the order in which they were received and may be edited for space.



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