

**A SHORT-LIVED NEWSPAPER FROM TG. MUREȘ, THE
ERDÉLYI TÁRSASÁG (1921-1922)****Kálmán Attila***

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Abstract

The very short-lived newspaper, Erdélyi Társaság, appeared in Tg. Mureș in the period 1921-1922. It was created as a society, cultural, arts newspaper. In its columns it presented society news, literary works, sporting events, cultural events. The newspaper is considered to be almost unique in the history of the Tg. Mureș written press.

Keywords: society; aristocracy; newspaper; theatre; *Erdélyi Társaság*

Society news, the world of the rich and famous, have always fascinated people. Newspapers, magazines have always had a column dedicated to the „adventures” of high society. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the two capitals-Vienna and Budapest- there were numerous newspapers and magazines that specialised on the topic of society events¹.

After World War I. and Trianon, the Hungarian speaking community of Transylvania had to reorganise itself, had to adapt to the new political and social climate created by Transylvania becoming part of Romania. In the case of the press many newspapers seized to exist and then new ones appeared, some of them having a short lifespan.

In Tg. Mureș, the local press was in the same situation as in other Transylvanian cities. There were already some initiatives in 1919 to start the local press and even magazines dedicated to society events.

The new paper was created in 1921 on the models of the same newspapers from Budapest. Its structure resembled that of the famous magazine edited in Budapest, *A Társaság* (The Society) which was edited by different clubs from the capital: Park, Úri, Golf, Magyar Unió, and the Úri club from Bratislava. In the after-war period, many of these clubs disappeared, but the editors succeeded in continuing the printing of this paper until 1944. In Transylvania there were some

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¹ Sport und Salon, Wiener Salonblatt, A Társaság, Színházi Élet.

antecedents, to edit society magazines, as well, although short lived, and many of them seized to exist not many years after the World War I².

The editors of the newspaper were Sényi László and Polónyi János. Polónyi is less known, but Sényi was a very well-known figure in the Tg. Mureş society. Sényi wasn't born in Transylvania, he came from a noble family who had their estates in the western part of Hungary, in Vas county. His father, Sándor, was an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army and married a member of the Transylvanian nobility, Szentiványi Gizella. So László, was born in 1874 in Braşov. He entered the local administration, activating in Mureş-Turda county. He was bequeathed with the honorary title of Imperial and Royal chamberlain (k.u.k. k ammerer). In 1907 he married countess Toldalagi Anna³. After 1920 the couple decided to remain in Romania and Sényi soon became influential in the cultural and literary life of Tg. Mureş.

Sényi was the best choice for the editor's job, himself having noble origins, he had married into the Transylvanian aristocracy, being a member of this social class, he had the necessary insight needed for this endeavour. His interest in culture, literature, his links with the Transylvanian cultural and social elites helped him create this paper and filling it with up to date information about the elites that were sometimes difficult to convince to be advertised.

Despite the editor's enthusiasm and optimism, the paper had a very short lifespan. Only 12. numbers eventually appeared (although numbers 4-5, 6-7, 8-9, 10-11 were double numbers).

Originally it was thought as a weekly paper, and it would appear on the Friday of every week. The first issue went on to appear on the 30th of September 1921 (to be followed by the next issues on: Oct. 7, Oct. 14, Oct. 28, Nov. 25, Dec. 6, Dec. 21), the last issue appeared on the 6th January 1922.

The paper advertised itself as a society, literary, and arts magazine. The editor's foreword in the first issue presents their credo. They would like to write about society, arts, sporting events, (the last will be the weakest column) and of course literature, although they stated that: *„irodalmat nem csin alunk, de feld isz itj uk lapunkat irodalommal”*, (we won't make literature, but will decorate our paper with literature). They also stated that the paper will try to be first and foremost a Transylvanian paper and wants to promote transylvanianism.

² Sz inh az  s t arsas ag, Sz inh azi Lapok, Sz inh azi  js ag which appeared in Cluj-Napoca, Sz inh az  s t arsas ag appeared in Tg. Mureş.

³ The Toldalagi family's main seat was in Corunca, near Tg. Mureş.

The structure of the paper was as follows: a cover photo, a second cover usually with a poem, then came feuilletons, poems, society news, sporting events, the fashion column, and miscellanea.

In the case of the cover photos, all but one of the photos had a short article linked to them⁴, usually short ones, but there are two longer ones (the articles about countess Teleki Edina, 1/1921 and about Szilvássy Carola, 3/1921).

The cover photo of the first issue represents countess Teleki Edina, the wife of the Count Teleki Domokos⁵ dressed-as stated by the writer of the column, probably Sényi himself-in an Eastern style gown. In the article linked to the photo her life is presented, mainly her role as a volunteer nurse during World War I. It seemed that she even sang to the troops, and the premiere of a song, was held at the hospital. The song was *Mikor az est mesélni kezd (When the evening starts to...)*⁶. The writer associates her talent with that of the famous actresses, Blaha Lujza⁷ or Pálmay Ilka⁸. But probably the most interesting event that is mentioned regarding countess Teleki is the meeting between the female representatives of Transylvanian high society and the German Kaiser. A delegation of these ladies headed by countess Teleki received Kaiser Wilhelm II. at the Railway station of Cluj-Napoca, in the autumn of 1917. The columnist pointed out that later the Kaiser sent a miniature portrait of himself to the countess.⁹

The second issue of the newspaper has a cover photo of Bodor Pál and his wife. The Bodor's were one of the most important sponsors of the Hungarian theatre of Tg. Mureș¹⁰. The third issue's cover photo depicts one of the most important representatives of the Transylvanian aristocracy, Szilvássy Carola, wife of Baron Bornemisza Elemér. In the article linked to the photo her talent as an actress is mentioned and also, they refer to her work as a nurse during the war¹¹.

⁴ It was the case of a photograph showing count Bethlen Pál and his wife, that appeared in nr. 12, that was basically an illustration linked to the news of their marriage that had already appeared in number 6-7.

⁵ They were the owners of Gornești castle.

⁶ It was written by Reményi Béla and Kalmár Tibor around 1915.

⁷ One of the most famous Hungarian actresses. She married into the aristocracy becoming the wife of Baron Splényi Ödön.

⁸ Famous actress and singer. Born Petráss Ilona, she performed in Budapest, Vienna, London. She married the Count Eugen Kinsky.

⁹ The event is retold by countess Teleki's son, Mihály in an interview given to the literary critic, Marosi Ildikó. The fate of the portrait is unknown. Marosi Ildikó, *Örökbe hagyott beszélgetés gróf Teleki Mihállyal*, Ed. Pallas Akadémia, 2004, p. 30.

¹⁰ They decided to emigrate to Hungary in 1926.

¹¹ She was an iconic character of the interwar period. She helped, with others, create the Erdélyi Helikon Writer's Association, which was created at the Kemény castle in Brâncovenesti.

The double 4-5. issue has a photo of Seregh Marcsa, who was an actress at the Hungarian Theatre in Cluj. The, also double, 6-7 issue had the photo of the Baron Rubido-Zichy Iván¹² as its cover photo. The 8-9 issue had a photo of the Countess Bissingen-Nippenburg Margit, wife of Baron Apor István with her daughters Klára and Maritta. The 10-11 issue, was a Christmas edition featuring the Roman-Catholic bishop of Transylvania, Count Majláth Gusztáv Károly. The 12th and last issue featured the photo of a photo studio. The photograph was made by Szilágyi Erzsébet wife of Chován Richárd and depicted her own studio. The interesting about this issue was that there was another cover photo featuring Count Bethlen Pál jun. and his wife Countess Serényi Ella.

After the cover photos there were the covers themselves. These featured almost exclusively poems.

The first issue had a text written by Szabolcska Mihály, a Calvinist priest from Timișoara, who greeted the readers and gave his blessing to the endeavour. In the next issues there were poems by: count Wass György, Kiss Menyhért,¹³ Heinrich Heine, Kiss Gyula,¹⁴ Máthé Mariska wife of Dékányi Kálmán. The double 6-7. issue appeared with a blank cover, probably being censored by the authorities.

As stated in the editor's very first column, literary works would have their own place in the paper, both poems and prose. The writers were usually of local and not of national fame. There was one writer writing under the pseudonym, Chryzanthème. In the second issue of the paper the reader could already find out that the writer was Mártonffy Aranka wife of Bignio Béla¹⁵ (she had several of her poems appear in the newspaper: Marosszentgyörgyi emlék/Memory from Sângeorgiu de Mureș 1890, Milyen?/How is it?, Őszi esték/Autumn evenings). Some of the poems of Kiss Menyhért, Kiss Gyula (Carmen Sylva: A boldogság/Happiness, Heine: Hol?/Where? translated by him and also his own works: Álarcosbál/Masked Ball, A tánc/The dance). Some of the poems and prose of Count Wass György also appeared in the paper (Emlékszel-e/Do you remember, Miért?/Why?).

Besides the poems, feuilletons appeared on a regular base. Many of them were written by local authors, some of them aristocrats, and a few were translations of foreign authors. It is interesting to

¹² The first Ambassador of Hungary to Bucharest.

¹³ Writer, journalist, he was born in Mătrici, today Mureș County. After World War I. he moved to Hungary where he became a member of Parliament.

¹⁴ Actor at the Theatre of Tg. Mureș. He was known for his Heine translations.

¹⁵ Bignio Béla was a physicist, his wife was a writer with a moderate fame, they lived in Luduș, county Mureș-Turda, today Mureș County.

mention the works of Molter Károly¹⁶: Bach fuga (Bach fugue), George d'Esparbés: A hülye (The lunatic), Baron Kemény János¹⁷: Az íróasztal meséi (Tales of the writing desk), Baron Jósika Gábor jun.: Szellemjárás (Haunting).

The editors of the paper also had a keen interest in the Transylvanian Hungarian theatrical movement. Many columns present news from the world of Transylvanian theatre, about actors and actresses, theatre directors (ex: Janovics Jenő, the director of the Hungarian Theatre in Cluj -Napoca). One of the most important news in this topic was the creation of the Association for the sustaining of the Hungarian Theatre in Tg. Mureș (Marosvásárhelyi Magyar Színpártoló Egyesület). The president of the association was elected Bernády György¹⁸, vice presidents became Drexler Béla, Bodor Pál (he was the initiator of the association), secretary: Polónyi János. Later the arts sub-section was created with members like: Sényi László and Molter Károly¹⁹.

Without a doubt the photos published in the few numbers that appeared of this paper have a huge historic value. They are mainly portraits of the representatives of the high society of Cluj-Napoca and Tg. Mureș and castles.

Probably the most interesting photo of them all is the one representing a hunting party in Gurghiu valley. The photo dates from the hunting held in 1888. The people shown on the photo were: count Károlyi István, archduke Rudolf, the heir of the throne²⁰, archdukes Otto²¹ and Friedrich, count Esterházy Lajos, Wilson esquire, Edward, the Prince of Wales²², count Bethlen Gábor, baron Bornemisza Tivadar, count Wurmbrandt, baron Jósika Samu, the prince of Braganza, baron Kemény Kálmán, count Orsini Rosenberg, baron Bornemisza András, Matskási István²³.

The photos representing buildings, especially castles are of great historic importance as well, because many of these buildings have disappeared, or have been transformed losing their original appearance: the castles of Gornești, Borșa, Răscruți, Dragu, Ernei,

¹⁶ Writer, teacher, university professor, literary critic, member of the Erdélyi Helikon Writer's Association.

¹⁷ Writer, founder of the Erdélyi Helikon Writer's Association, owner of the Brâncovenesti estate, Mureș County.

¹⁸ Mayor of Tg. Mureș between 1902-1913 and 1926-1929.

¹⁹ *Erdélyi Társaság*, 6-7/1921, p. 65; 8-9/1921, p. 85.

²⁰ Archduke Rudolf, son of Franz Joseph and Elisabeth was given the Gurghiu estate in 1881.

²¹ Archduke Otto was the son of Archduke Karl Ludwig, the brother of Franz Joseph, and he was the father of Archduke Karl, who would become the last Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary in 1916.

²² Son of Queen Victoria, he would become King under the name Edward VII.

²³ *Erdélyi Társaság*, 4-5/1921, p. 55.

Beclean (the castle owned by the widow of count Bethlen András, Livia Mocioni), the now non-existent old castle of Glodeni and the also non-existent manor of Breaza (the photographs of Breaza manor were taken by the wife of the owner, Princess Odesclachi Anna wife of the Baron Bánffy Zoltán).

The newspaper had a column named: Splinters/Chippings. These were famous quotations, sayings from famous people, for example: Heine, La Rochefoucauld, Oscar Wilde, Carmen Sylva, Voltaire, Pascal. There were also some special ones by Countess Teleki Edina.

Society news take up a lot of space in the paper. Most of them are common everyday society news: balls (in the castles, manors of Brâncovenesti, Cămărașu, Sâncrai, Arcalia or Tonciu), charity events, marriages, funerals, visits, holidays (spent usually in Gastein, Sovata or Baden bei Wien).

But there are strange and sometimes very intimate news, for example: countess Bethlen Ilona wife of Count Haller György broke her ankle while visiting her sister in Zăbala²⁴. Also, about the Haller family, on the 30th September 1921 burglars broke in the Haller family's castle in Sânpaul and according to the news they stole artifacts and a part of the silver cutlery. They also mention that the police investigation hasn't turned up many results²⁵.

There was also news about girls attending foreign institutions in Dresden, München or Budapest.

A special event should have been the evening organised by the paper at the Palace of Culture of Tg. Mureș. Among the organisers we can find the ladies of high society of Tg. Mureș: Countess Lázár Eleonóra widow of count Bissingen Ottó, the wife of Bernády György, the wife of Bodor Pál, countess Toldalagi Anna wife of Sényi László.

On October 7th, 1921, the Transylvanian stud owners held a meeting in Cluj-Napoca and they decided to organise the Horsebreeders section of the Transylvanian Economic Association: they elected as president Count Bánffy György²⁶, as vice-presidents: Count Teleki Arctur, Count Toldalagi László. Members: Count Béldi Kálmán sen., baron Jósika Gábor, baron Wesselényi Miklós, Máriaffi Albert, Count Degenfeld Miksa, Baron Daniel Ferenc²⁷.

Interestingly some of the columnists were fairly critical with the different social events. For example, the charity event organised by the Klotild Szekler Orphanage for Girls, held at the Palace of Culture

²⁴ *Erdélyi Társaság*, 1/1921, p. 8. It refers to countess Bethlen Klementina wife of Count Mikes Ármin. The family still lives on the estate of Zăbala in county Covasna.

²⁵ *Erdélyi Társaság*, 2/1921, p. 24.

²⁶ Owner of the Bontida estate in county Cluj.

²⁷ *Erdélyi Társaság*, 3/1921, p. 36.

was criticised for the organisation being pretty slopy, but-they also mentioned-it was of high quality²⁸.

And then of course there were some articles dedicated to fashion and there was the issue with the sporting column. As we mentioned before the sporting events weren't many: there was a swimming contest organised by the MTK (Marosvásárhelyi Torna Klub-The Gymnastics Club of Tg. Mureş), whose winner was baroness Bánffy Judit the wife of count Bethlen Ádám. There was only one mention of a football match and a tennis match, but the last one held in Hungary. Most of the sporting events were related to hunting and even here more accounts written by the participants themselves (for ex: Vaddisznók a tóban/Boars in the lake, written by the count Wass György, in *Taga* on the 9th November 1921)²⁹.

In every issue there were some editor's messages and of course some advertisements.

The last issue appeared on the 6th of January 1922. The whole last editorial is full of pessimism. The editors tried to find answers to what had led to the demise of the paper³⁰. They blame the Transylvanian society itself who didn't support the newspaper enough, the old generation was malicious towards the paper and the young generation wasn't interested. They also blamed the printers strike that made the printing process very difficult although the Weinberger Press did all that they could.

In this last issue the list of those who subscribed to the paper was published. There were 11 whole year subscribers and 32 half year subscribers, in total 43³¹. Analysing the list we can conclude that most of the subscribers lived in and around Tg. Mureş, this underlines the fact that the paper remained mostly a local paper even if it wanted to have a regional influence.

Between the society news of this last issue, we can find a short reference to the benefit ball organised by the paper on January 3rd 1922, but they refuse to write about it, stating only that it was good.

²⁸ *Erdélyi Társaság*, 2/1921, p. 24.

²⁹ *Erdélyi Társaság*, 8-9/1921, p. 95.

³⁰ On November 4th they had already announced the subscribers in a leaflet that they are going to suspend the appearance of the newspaper because of the printer's strike.

³¹ Among the whole year subscribers: Princess Odescalchi Anna wife of Bánffy Zoltán, Countess Teleki Polixénia wife of Baron Bornemisza András, Szilvássy Margit wife of Count Béldi György, Bodor Pál, Éltető Katica, Baroness Huszár Margit, Baron Kemény Ákos, Baron Rubido Zichy Iván, Wladár Ervin; Among the half year subscribers: Drexler Béla, Countess Bethlen Ilona wife of Count Haller György, Baroness Wesselényi Erzsébet wife of Máriaffi Lajos, The Hungarian Bank of Tg. Mureş, Patrubány Miklós, Countess Vay Olga wife of Count Somssich Tihamér, Countess Zichy Melanie wife of Count Zichy Wladimir.

They finish the column by saying goodbye with the French quotation *Partir c'est mourir un peu*³².

Sadly, the paper never appeared again. The main editor, Sényi, though went on to become one of the leading figures in the cultural life of the Hungarian community of Tg. Mureș, becoming secretary of the Kemény Zsigmond Literary Association.

The *Erdélyi Társaság* was probably the only true society newspaper in Transylvania in the interwar period. After its demise other newspapers in Tg. Mureș and Transylvania tried to continue the idea; but they didn't do exactly the same. Every newspaper, magazine had society news but there wasn't any other paper dedicated exclusively to the high society³³.

The paper had a strong aristocratic character, although there was a middle-class presence, the articles that featured were about and sometimes written by members of the aristocracy.

The newspaper is not only important in the history of printed press in Transylvania, but it was extremely important for the local and regional history. It gives a cross section of life in Tg Mures at the beginning of the 1920's.

We can not emphasize enough the importance of the photographic material. The end of World War II. meant the destruction of many archival materials, so these are of great importance. The pieces of information help to recreate biographical data. They also give an insight into the private lives of historical figures which otherwise probably wouldn't be available.

³² From the poem *Rondel de l'adieu*, from the volume *Seul* (1890) of the French writer Edmond Haraucourt.

³³ In Tg. Mureș: Színház és mozi, A színházi hét, Színházi újság.