

Sopron Division of Forestry Collection / (various collectors)

Compiled by Erwin Wodarczak (2021)

University of British Columbia Archives



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Collection Description

Sopron Division of Forestry Collection (various collectors). – 1965-2021.

24 cm of textual records.

Historical Sketch

In 1735 an academy of mining was established in northern Hungary in Selmec, in what is now Slovakia – courses in forestry were added in 1809. After the end of the First World War and the collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918 Czechoslovakia gained its independence – the new country included the town of Selmec. As the School of Mining and Forestry was primarily a Hungarian institution, it was moved – first to Budapest, then in March 1919 to Sopron near the Austrian border.

After the Second World War Hungary was occupied by the Soviet Union. In October 1956 a rebellion took place and Hungarian citizens, including students in Sopron, attempted to drive Soviet occupying forces out of the country. The rebellion was crushed by the Soviets in November 1956. About 250 forestry students and professors and their families fled Sopron across the border to Austria. Kalman Roller, dean of the Sopron Faculty of Forestry, did everything he could to keep his group of refugees together. When it became obvious that they would not be able to return to Hungary, Dean Roller sent letters to twenty countries asking for refuge. While several countries expressed interest, Canada's response was the most promising one. The Faculty of Forestry at the University of British Columbia offered to "adopt" the Sopron forestry programme. UBC guaranteed that it would remain separate – the Sopron Division of Forestry – until all current students graduated. Classes would be given by Sopron faculty in Hungarian, gradually phasing in English courses given by UBC professors. After several lengthy debates a large proportion of Sopron students and faculty decided to accept the offer from UBC. In January 1957, 14 faculty members and 200 students, with their families, left for Canada. After short stops in St. John and Abbotsford, the group settled temporarily in Powell River, taking time to study English and adjust to their new home.

The first academic year began at UBC in September 1957. There was initially a difficult period of adjustment. The main barrier between the Sopron people and the rest of the University administration and students was language. However, there was enough good will on both sides to resolve any misunderstandings and other issues. A good working relationship between Dean Roller, UBC Forestry Dean George Allen, and UBC President Norman MacKenzie was also essential during this period. By May 1961 the last class had graduated from the Sopron Division to make the total number of graduates 141. Since their arrival at UBC, Sopron Division faculty and alumni have had

a profound impact on the forestry profession and the forest industry in British Columbia and across Canada.

Scope and Content

Collection consists of materials collected or acquired from various sources that document the history of the Sopron Division of Forestry and its alumni. It includes a set of the *Kapocs* Sopron alumni newsletter.

Notes

File list available.

Materials in the *Kapocs* series donated by Laszlo Retfalvi in November 2021.

Further accruals are expected.

Series Descriptions

Kapocs series – 1965-2021.

24 cm of textual records.

Kapocs (“The Link”) is a newsletter created and distributed by alumni of the Sopron Division of Forestry, to document the stories and activities of Sopron graduates.

The contents of *Kapocs* are written almost entirely in Hungarian.

File List

BOX 1

KAPOCS SERIES

- 1-1 "Kapocs" – 10 issues 1965-68
- 1-2 "Kapocs" – 11 issues 1969-82
- 1-3 "Kapocs" – 7 issues 1984-89
- 1-4 "Kapocs" – 5 issues 1991-95
- 1-5 "Kapocs" – 5 issues 1997-2002

BOX 2

- 2-1 "Kapocs" – 7 issues 2003-06
- 2-2 "Kapocs" – 9 issues 2007-11
- 2-3 "Kapocs" – 9 issues 2012-16
- 1 issue noted as missing
- 2-4 "Kapocs" – 10 issues 2017-21