

The story of Károly Francsics's barber shop

Károly Francsics (1804-1880) was barber in Veszprém, who had left a memoir of several thousand pages, in which we can read about life in Veszprém during the Reform era. He began writing his diary in 1846, diligently recording the seemingly small and unimportant, but historically significant details of his everydaylife. His stories allow us to learn about the lives of ordinary men, experiencing the emergence of the Reform Era and the Dualism. We read about wooden benches of the barber shops, and rugged mirrors and imagine walking around apartments and eating bacon in spacious rooms of country pubs. Ball music comes from the Korona of Veszprém, maids dancing to the sounds of the zither, Csárdás is being danced to gypsy music in a garden of a Veszprém restaurant, Hungarian national guards marching in the streets. One day the white-red-green flag was raised on the Fire Tower, the next day yellow black was seen on the terrace of the City Hall. His memories take us back to those days lived by the common men of Veszprém.

Károly Francsics arrived to Veszprém in 1827 and died here in 1880. He never stopped writing his memoires. His barber shop was situated on Rákóczi út, frequented by many, serving as a sort of news center. He recorded the revolution's daily events in his diary. The news of the revolution breaking out in Pest was brought to the county by Mór Fischer, founder of the Herendi Porcelan Factory, on the 16th of March. People heard about it first in Pápa. They were overjoyed. We read in his diary about the people of Veszprém, merchants, tradesman, and Jews returning home from the Pest market on March 17th and 18th, bringing with them a copy of the 12 points and the National Song printed by Landerer. Francsics kept a copy of each of them, which can now be seen in the Veszprém Archives. Although Francsics was obsessively collecting posters and notices, he was forced to burn nearly all of them when the imperial army entered 1848-49.

More details about his life: His father sent him to Krisztián Schillinger's barber shop, and he began his apprenticeship at the age of 12 (1816). Schillinger was the surgeon of the county, as well as the head of the surgeon guild of Pápa. He finished his apprenticeship on December 31, 1820, and was able to begin his travels as an assistant barber. He visited Szombathely, Kiscell, Győr, Pest, Pozsony, Nyitra and finally in 1827 he returned to his hometown with an empty haversack. The 23-year-old Francsics was hired by János Halas to work in his shop at the Market Square (Rákóczi utca 4.).

The drunkard young man settled down in Veszprém, where he met Zsófia Jákói, a young lady from a respectable family in the city. Her influence inspired him to begin reading in his free time, he also helped out in Zsófi's private sowing school and created a flower nursery in the garden of Mr Halas with the help of French gardener József Müller. The boring winter days prompted him to start writing his diary and as he put it: "As the barber becomes a gardener, with time I have become a writer."

In the summer of 1847, at the age of 43, he began recording the events of the past 20 years, while keeping up with the daily diary entries as well. He filled six thick volumes with the stories of Veszprém, events during the Reform Era, the 1848-49 Revolution and the changes during those times. He diligently collected different publications and posters of the Revolution, recognizing their historical significance.

In 1853 he took over the barber shop and finally got married. Taking over Mr. Halas's two-story house, and his mother-in-law's lands, he became a well-to-do man. In 1859 he also bought a vineyard in Balatonalmádi. The idyll was short-lived, as he started to face financial difficulties starting from the 1860s. His vineyard investments were unsuccessful, and the new trend of beards has destroyed his barbershop business. In 1875 Veszprém Takarékpénztár (Veszprém Bank of the time) filed a suit against Francsics due to his substantial debts. As a result, he lost all his assets and ended up in a poor house for the last 5 years of his life. He was 75 years old when he fell ill and died on the 4th of July, 1880 in a city hospital. He was poor and completely alone. His grave was never recovered.

Károly Francsics's diary can be found:

https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/PRGYK_Fk_03/?pg=0&layout=s



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