

THESES OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Printing Presses in the County of Szabolcs 1867-1950

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1. The Subject Chosen and its Significance

Printing presses occupy a special place in research projects. The projects dealing with the history of printing primarily focus on the development of printing, with special attention to the technical side of development. Labour movements in the printing presses are also often a subject of research. It is, however, also possible to examine the history of printing presses from a different point of view. The products made in the presses constitute special historical documents, characteristic of the age in which they were printed. In the face of this recognition, complex research projects have recently been accomplished, dealing with one particular printing press or the printing presses of one particular settlement had.

In the course of my graduate studies I dealt with the history of Jóba Printing Press of Nyíregyháza. The press has been regarded as one of the largest and most important printing press of the city in the period following the Compromise between Austria and Hungary in 1867. My late supervisor, Dr Krisztina Voit suggested that I should extend my research to the entire historical county of Szabolcs. Thus the geographical boundaries and the time frame of the research were both determined, the latter by the re-organization of the county system in 1950, when Szabolcs county as such ceased to exist. The beginning of the period is 1867, the Austrian-Hungarian Compromise, which is a significant date in Hungarian industrial, economic and cultural history.

2. Statement of Purpose

One of the priorities of the research was an examination of the factors that instigated a rapid development of printing industry in Hungary, under what circumstances were the new printing workshops set up, and what legal regulations, related to the printing industry, were introduced. Another aspect of the research was an examination of the technical equipment of the printing workshops. I also wished to reveal the particular, local circumstances and conditions that determined the establishment and work of the printing workshops in Szabolcs county, and whether the nationwide tendencies that promoted the establishment of new printing presses were also active in the county. When examining the

individual printing presses, I also examined the characteristic documents they produced, in order to find out what significance these documents had from the aspect of the economic and cultural development of the area.

I used the press bibliography compiled by Margit Farkas as a starting point for my research. In the meanwhile, Ágota G. László compiled the bibliography of all the periodicals published in the printing presses of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. The bibliography, published by Zsigmond Móricz County and City Library in 2002, afforded a new source for the research. The most promising press books, however, have not been preserved by the library, so it was only possible to study some surviving specimens and the required copies supplied to the National Széchényi Library.

I had originally assumed that I would find abundant sources about the establishment and operation of printing presses, but I had difficulties in this field. Where the local industrial registers have survived, there were occasional entries about the printing press of the settlement concerned. These registers are, however, often restricted to the beginning or registration of the activity, and do not contain any description of its termination and the reasons why the business terminated. A useful source of additional information has been "Nyomdászati évkönyv és úti kalauz" [Printers' Annal and Guide], which contains data regarding the operation, employees and technical equipment of printing presses. Surveying the practice of contemporary administration and legal regulations has also been useful for the research. That is the reason why I found it necessary to look into the documents stored at the industrial registers of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce of Debrecen. The Chamber functioned partly as an official authority and partly as an interest negotiating organization, so the printing presses and the officials responsible for business activities of the settlement concerned supplied data to the Chamber on a regular basis. An important initial source was the data base on printing presses in "Typographia." Later, however, it became necessary to correct the contents of Typographia when they were compared with data from other sources, especially in terms of years and data of registration.

In addition to contemporary annals, journals of the printing trade have also been involved in my research. These included the journals of the printers' unions and professional publications, and they provided a comprehensive view into the living- and working conditions of printers. It is possible to follow the changes in the life of the

printers, the development of the technology they used through these periodicals. The owners of printing presses in the provinces also created their own unions and published their own journals, thus providing additional data for the research.

A special and increasingly important means of research has been the Internet. With the help of Internet, I have been able to find two books produced in the printing presses subject to my research. The books are at the Library of Congress in the United States. The Internet has been similarly useful in finding biographical data of printing workshop owners in the County of Szabolcs. I have been able to establish the data of the birth and death of several printing press owners in the county with the help of the World Wide Web. Through the Internet I was able to contact a former apprentice in one of the small printing workshops, who helped my work with his memories.

3. A Summary of the Research Findings

Thesis 1

The considerable increase in the number of printing presses after the Compromise of 1867 was assisted by legal regulations favourable to businesses, in addition to the general prosperity of the period.

A series of new technical inventions helped to increase and accelerate the production of printed matter in the first half of the 19th century. The publications also became cheaper and came out in a much higher number than ever before. The new inventions often reached Hungary only with a considerable delay. The increase in the number of printing presses was therefore largely the result of legal regulations favourable to industry and services. The law on industry of 1872 made printing a free branch of industry. From that time on, the sole condition of establishing a printing press was sufficient capital. The law on industry of 1884 only required the registration of a new printing press, and posed no further demand. Trained and qualified printers were allowed to have apprentices who, after learning the basics of the trade, were a cheap labour force for the owners of the workshops. In order to increase their profit, they often employed more apprentices than fully trained printers.

The laws, however, only encouraged and supported the establishment of printing presses where social and economic conditions promised safe business and regular customers. The printing presses tended to appear at administrative centres, the district and county towns where public administration in itself was a customer, placing orders with local workshops for printed matter.

Thesis 2

The original press law of 1848, coming back into effect in 1867, was particularly favourable for establishing printing presses.

The printing presses welcomed the new newspapers published as a result of the press law. Sometimes even the printing presses themselves published newspapers. In addition to the printed matter ordered from them, it was sometimes the regularly printed local newspapers that kept the smaller provincial printing presses afloat. That is why we often find the names of printing press owners in the lists of editors and publishers. As newspapers became widespread, business advertising in the press also started. Because of the economic difficulties of the period and the small number of people reading books, the number of books printed did not increase in proportion to the increase in the number of printing presses. Consequently the daily newspapers and magazines became the most common source of literature as well to the general public. Those interested regularly used to read them in cafés and casinos.

In addition to publishing newspapers, the printing presses competed for orders placed by the state, as such orders meant continuous work and revenue. The most lucrative business for the printing presses was producing documents for the local administration. Such documents were ordered in large quantities from year to year. The printing presses of Kisvárdá distributed the market among themselves, and such an agreement was really unique in those days.

Prominent politicians financially supported politically loyal newspapers and the printing presses producing such newspapers. In the lack of regular orders and financial support, a lot of newspapers in the provinces did not last long; several of them was only able to produce issue.

Under the effects and circumstances outlined above, the number of printing presses multiplied by ten between the Compromise of 1867 and 1900, when their number was 531.

Thesis 3

The majority of the printing presses in the provinces were small workshops.

Printing as a free trade caused serious problems to trained printers. The entire period of the history of printing presses subject to this thesis was characterised by the efforts of the printing press owners and trained printers to introduce qualification criteria for practising the trade or to reduce the number of licences to be issued.

Often the owners of the new printing presses intended to use their workshop as a source of additional revenue. They entered their printing workshop into the company register together with a trading company of books, paper and stationery. The registers suggest that the new printing workshops did not always bring the desired financial success. The owners used various methods in order to avoid deficit; some joined forces with a partner, some opened a shop to diversify the profile of the business, but many had to close down the business soon. It is interesting that several printing workshops had been sold, but the workshop continued business under the original name, and the required copies were supplied to the National Library under that name. That is why we encounter contradictory data in various sources that list different owners of the same printing press at the same period.

Thesis 4

The printed matter is the most reliable evidence of the quality of the work of the printing press and the skills of the printer.

In the case of the small provincial printing presses it may easily be misleading to attempt to judge the quality of their work by the small number of their employees or their modest technical equipment. A good example for that is the book printing press of Bernát Silberstein of Mándok. Contemporary sources hardly contain any reference to his printing press. A book by Count József Forgách entitled *Szalánczvár eredete és nevezetesebb eseményei* [*The Origins and Noteworthy Events of Szalánczvár*], printed by Silberstein and today stored at the University Library of Debrecen, reflects high technical skills. The book of high quality proves that the printer used the clichés in a masterly way. The book contains a number of illustrations, the pictures have a protective sheet on them, and the book is bound in canvas.

It appears that the small printing presses did not produce more books of high quality because they were unable to, but because there were no orders placed for such works. The attribute "book printing press" added to the name of the owner of the workshop indicates that

the printer was trained in producing books, and his workshop was duly equipped for such activity.

Thesis 5

The printing industry was a major fermentor of social and cultural progress

At the period when the number of newspapers increased, the annual issue of school reports was introduced in Hungary, following the Austrian school reform–Entwurf–of 1849. Schools became regular customers to printing presses that produced the schools reports from year to year. A large number of such documents has survived for the posterity. They provide an accurate insight into the subjects taught at the schools, as well as the operation of the schools, the teachers and the life of the institutions in general.

The volumes of poetry and shorts stories published in the printing presses in the provinces suggest that cultural life became more vivid in the period concerned.

An examination of the living conditions of printers shows that they constituted the most educated, well-informed layer of workers who made efforts to improve their living standards and to organize their vocational further training. The professional journals of the printers continually urged the members of the trade to use new, high quality clichés, novelties, new font types and technologies. The advertisements in the professional journals offered the latest embossed and coloured printing technologies. The engravers and graphic designers of the period were also able to produce works of lasting quality.

4. The utilization of the research findings

I am able to utilize the research findings in my work, training college students of librarianship. Professionals dealing with books will have a broader aspect, a better understanding of social, economic and cultural interrelations. The sources analysed in the thesis and the conclusions drawn from them may inspire new research programmes into unrevealed chapters of the printing industry. Missing and not yet processed parts of the documents stored in the archives also necessitate the continuation of the research. Researchers may find new elements of the image, and may come to new conclusions. Printing industry is an economic venture, but its cultural significance makes it necessary to continue the research from a cultural-historical aspect.