
Joseph Pulitzer's Roots in Europe: A Genealogical History

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The name of Joseph Pulitzer (1847—1911) is known nowadays mainly because of the prizes endowed by him and awarded annually for notable achievements in American journalism, letters, and music. In most countries outside America, including Europe, few know more about him than that he was a millionaire who donated large sums for noble purposes. A penniless immigrant who joined the Union Army in the Civil War, a youth who kept body and soul together by hard labor, then became a newspaper editor and publisher, and later a congressman, he turned out to live the life of a real American to the end of his lifetime. Perhaps, this is why so little is known about this great self-made man even in his native Hungary, which he left in 1864 with the purpose of making some sort of a military career.

By way of introduction it must be remembered—and this is widely accepted and acknowledged in the United States—that Pulitzer was one of the greatest figures in modern journalism and a democratic reformer of his age. Trained under Carl Schurz, he first founded and made a respectable newspaper of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in 1878. Meanwhile, he studied law and became active in politics. His career as an innovator of mass-appeal journalism began in earnest in 1882 when he bought the nearly bankrupt *New York World* and made it a hard-hitting exponent of democracy and social justice based on mass-circulation and initially upon an appeal to the interests of workingmen. The period 1883 to 1885 is pivotal in the history of the *World* but also in the history of the international press. During this period politics was increasingly subordinated to “news,” and in consequence highly efficient methods of reporting and newsgathering were developed. It was the era for the creation of press chains, and for the enlargement and improved appearance of newspapers. We note the growing importance of the editorial page and of advertising. With the development of printing technology, newspapers became the first real mass communication media, so influential in American political life even today.



Joseph Pulitzer's birthplace (center) in Makó, Hungary.

(Courtesy András Csillag)

No one better represented this new journalism than Pulitzer. As for the techniques, he introduced many that other papers later borrowed—some of them guardedly and almost against their will, others wholeheartedly. For example, he was responsible for the first extensive use of illustrations (excellent, expressive cartoons) and the development of the sports page, and he played a role equal to that of any other publisher in making women part of the newspaper-reading public. Pulitzer established his credentials as a master journalist by responding quickly and adroitly to the drift of social change. As he once told one of his secretaries, Alleyne Ireland,

The American people want something terse, forcible, picturesque, striking, something that will arrest their attention, enlist their sympathy, arouse their indignation, stimulate their imagination, convince their reason, awaken their conscience It [the *World*] is read by, well, say a million people a day; and it's my duty to see that they get the truth; but that's not enough, I've got to put it before them briefly to that they will read it, clearly so that they will understand it, forcibly so that they will appreciate it, picturesquely so that they will remember it, and, above all, accurately so that they may be wisely guided by its light.^{32*}

As a publisher, Pulitzer's regard for the dignity and the responsibilities of his profession was also pivotal. It influenced him in many ways, notably in making him a leader among those who agitated for social reform. The presence in the *World's* large readership of many who were dispossessed and helpless lent a tone of personal involvement to its fearless and independent editorials that other papers did not share. The *World* became a national institution. Although Democratic in its principles, it was one of the leading independent voices of opinion in the United States and frequently attracted notice as a crusading organ. In the 1880's it successfully supported Grover Cleveland for the presidency and advocated the governmental curbing of monopolies, the right of workers to unionize, the imposition of stiff taxes on large incomes and inheritances, and thorough civil service reform, while taking the side of immigrants against a largely hostile nativist America. Pulitzer and his staff perfected, if they did not invent, the use of the news columns to support editorial attacks by campaigns of exposure.

*Superior numbers correspond to numbered items in the list of Sources at the end of the article.

In 1887 he established the *Evening World*, and for the period of time he served in Congress was the first representative of Hungarian birth in that office. Pulitzer's newspapers temporarily—especially during a competitive war with William Randolph Hearst in the 1890's—resorted to sensationalism and other "yellow journal" practices. It was at that time that Pulitzer became an advocate of war with Spain. But, again, *the World* was restored by its publisher to its former eminence as a high-minded journal of intelligent opinion. The repeated disclosures of municipal graft, state corruption, and business abuses reached their climax in the crusade of 1905 against the mismanagement of the principal life insurance companies. The *World's* attacks on prominent people, including President Theodore Roosevelt, resulted in the indictment of Pulitzer for criminal libel, but the case was never prosecuted.

Pulitzer's chief efforts—as they may be summed up—were bent to the restriction of trusts and other aggregations of wealth at a time of steadily growing industrial capitalism, and from 1883 to 1911 the *World* led all other American newspapers in demanding the break-up of monopolies by antitrust laws, and a close watch on the "money power." This paper was the most consistent crusader against governmental corruption and the economic exploitation of the poor, testifying to the publisher's steadfast loyalty to convictions formed at the beginning of his career. In Pulitzer's own words, from his confession of faith, "There is not a crime, there is not a dodge, there is not a trick, there is not a swindle, there is not a vice which does not live by secrecy. Get these things out in the open, describe them, ridicule them in the press, and sooner or later public opinion will sweep them away."³²

In his later years, stricken with almost complete blindness and ill health, Pulitzer relinquished direct management of his publications, though continuing to control policy. His bequest made possible the founding of the Pulitzer School of Journalism at Columbia University and the establishment of the Pulitzer Prizes.

Errors and Omissions in Previous Writings on Joseph Pulitzer

After settling down in the *New World*, Pulitzer never denied his Hungarian background, but neither did he emphasize it too often.²⁸ And he was fully aware, even at the zenith of his career, that he could never

become a president of the United States because he was foreign born, an immigrant. As he left no autobiography or memoir behind, most of the significant printed sources on him—monographs, histories of journalism, encyclopedias, etc.—treat the years before his emigration as an almost complete “terra incognita.” This phase of his life is generally discussed only briefly and vaguely. His descent and family background, along with the circumstances in which he spent his youth, have never been revealed with full authenticity and precision for various reasons. Perhaps the most important of these has been the lack of relevant source materials for those who wrote about him in the United States. This usually resulted in their accepting what previously had been written about his family background of the Hungary period or in their fictionalizing it, as Granberg did in his biographical story, *The World of Joseph Pulitzer*.³⁸ What little was known until now about Pulitzer’s origins was mainly derived from two of the earliest books on him: the first written by Ireland and the second by Don Seitz, another close associate of the publisher.³²

In Hungary, the number of printed sources on Pulitzer has been very limited and not based on genuine research. The first more or less thorough study was published right after his death, in Budapest, in a series of books entitled *Karrierék* [Careers].²⁰ More than fifty years later, Tivadar Acs, in a chapter of his work on Hungarians in the American Civil War, made a lengthier mention of Pulitzer, but he too was far from giving new biographical details.²¹ For the period between the two books, only some superficial newspaper articles are available on Pulitzer. Nevertheless, almost all of the important Hungarian encyclopedias, old and new alike, make a brief mention of him or the prizes, and are more or less accurate.

As a matter of fact, Pulitzer’s name is hardly known even in Makó, his native town. Until quite recently it was impossible to trace any aspect of his existence in his place of birth: no street is named after him, no building is marked, and no statue or monument there keeps his memory alive. A picture in the town museum and the widow of the last surviving distant relative are all that is there to remind the visitor of the Pulitzer name. It is mainly the older local people who might have heard about him, but even they hardly know more than “that he made a legendary fortune in America.” Efforts are now being made—as a result of recent archival researches of which this present study is a

part—to uncover facts about Pulitzer’s Hungarian background and thus make it better known in his native country and elsewhere.

There is, perhaps, only one thing on which all the significant foreign and Hungarian printed sources unanimously agree: Pulitzer’s date of birth. All other particulars referring to his Hungarian background differ according to the several biographies written and published about him. Such mistaken or disputed particulars are, for example, the place of his birth, the nationality and religion of his parents and therefore his own, the particulars about his brothers and sisters, the occupation and property status of his parents, his education, the reasons why he left Hungary, etc. This article will point out some of these common mistakes and by disclosing new details make an attempt to give a brief sketch of the Pulitzers in Hungary.

The Pulitzer Family’s Origins

The religion and the nationality of Joseph Pulitzer’s parents are crucial questions in judging his background. Several of even the most significant monographs and biographies on him, including the German *Lexikon des Judentums*, accept as a fact the view published by Ireland and Seitz, and widespread in America, that Joseph’s father was a Hungarian Jew, and his mother, a Christian, and Austro-German Catholic. As early as the 1930’s, Edmund Vasváry, in his work *Lincoln’s Hungarian Heroes*, rejected the veracity of this assertion relative to the mother’s background.³⁶ In fact, as can now be verified by numerous authentic documents, the truth is that both parents were Hungarian-born Jews. These documents, along with many other relevant ones used for this study, were discovered in the Csongrád County Archive in Szeged, the Municipal Archive and the Museum of Makó, and the Metropolitan Archive of Budapest.

In the popular census of Makó for the year 1850, each member of the Pulitzer family is entered separately and unmistakably under the heading of Religion as “Israelitic” and under Nationality as “Jewish.” Other official records from this time, such as registers of issued passes and passports, which, among the particulars and various other data, state religious persuasion, confirm that Mrs. Pulitzer, too, was a Jew and was born in Hungary.¹

The family of Joseph Pulitzer on his father’s side was extremely

widespread in the Hungary of the past two centuries. The ancestors had several lines of descent, with many branches distantly and vaguely related, if they had any relationship at all except for a common name. The Pulitzers, or *Politzers*, as the name was spelled by members of some *other* branches of the family, came to Hungary from Moravia at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Their name can be derived from a place name in the region,¹² for in southern Moravia, then a province of Austria, the village of *Pullitz* or in the native language *Police*, had a considerable Jewish population in the eighteenth century. Formerly, in the Middle Ages, it also went by the name of *Policz*.²² This village, from which the Pulitzers took their name, is now in the Trébič district of Czechoslovakia, near the Austrian border, and has the name of *Police* (not identical with another village of the same name in northern Moravia).

In the eighteenth century, Nikolsburg, a major city in Moravia, also had Politzers living within its walls. Two of them were traders, and another was chief rabbi of the province around 1770.⁸ It is an historical fact that a large number of Moravian Jews came to Hungary, first as traders, later as permanent residents, at that time. Like Moravia, Hungary was then part of the Austrian Empire, and Jewish immigration from Moravia began in the second half of the century due mainly to economic reasons. Owing to the privileges granted by large landowners, the majority of the Jewish newcomers, in order to pursue their economic functions, such as delivery of goods, leaseholding, peddling, village commerce, and moneylending, first settled down in manorial centers, country towns, and villages of the treasury. The Moravian Jews quickly spread to many parts of the country, and through their commercial activities made a considerable contribution to the economic revival of Hungary, which had been liberated from the long Turkish occupation a short time earlier. Hostility or discrimination in some towns also often made them wander on and seek a new place for permanent residence within the country.

In the Hungary of the eighteenth century, as is shown by local censuses of Jews, we can find Pulitzers (Politzers) living in several localities along the main roads that Moravian Jews followed to populate the country. In Nyitra County, formerly northwestern Hungary, for example, where trading contacts with Moravian Jews had been the most intensive, we can discover several Politzers in various places between

1730 and 1746. In Buda, the first Politzer, Isaac, appears with his family in the census of 1735 as a kosher butcher. It is clearly indicated that he still paid an annual tax of 6 florins to Prince Valter, his hereditary lord in Moravia. Following the expulsion of Jews from Buda by a royal decree in 1746, the Politzer family moved to neighboring Óbuda. Later, at the turn of the century and soon thereafter, the Politzers lived in other localities in central Hungary (where most of the Jews gathered because of its economic importance) such as Zsámbék, Óbuda, Pest, Irsa, etc.⁸ The southern region, the Great Plain with its excellent possibilities of corn growing and trade in agricultural produce, soon attracted many of the immigrant Jews. Szeged and its environs was a thriving agricultural and business center, with many of Jewish traders attending its fairs, as early as the first half of the eighteenth century. Lebl Politzer, a goldsmith, and his family, who arrived in Szeged from Óbuda, were among the first Jews who were permitted to settle in the city on a permanent basis in 1786. His son Salamon, also a goldsmith and a leading member of the Jewish community, moved to Vienna in 1870, where he ran a jewelry shop of good reputation.¹⁸

The Hungarian town where the earliest settlement of Pulitzers was registered is Nagyvárad, then southeastern Hungary, now Oradea, Romania. Abraham, the son of Aaron Pulitzer, was recorded there as early as 1722.¹⁹ Several members of the family lived there throughout the century, and in 1736 one of them, Moyses, still paid tax to his hereditary lord, back in Moravia, Count Berchtold, who evidently owned the village of Pullitz.⁸

The Jewish Community of Makó

As regards Makó, Joseph Pulitzer's native town, it was the county seat of Csanád and the property of Bishop Stanislavich in the first half of the eighteenth century. The bishop, a major landowner himself, granted Jews permission to settle there permanently around 1743. Csanád County and Makó, which lies on the right bank of the river Maros, 200 kilometers southeast of Budapest and 30 kilometers east of Szeged, had previously been a relatively sparsely populated area with fertile land and good agricultural possibilities. At first, as a favor from the bishop to encourage settlement, Jews were not requested to pay any other tax than for the right of "tolerance." Former commercial

experiences of visiting Jews in this area, with Szeged, the thriving trading center in agricultural produce, being so near, and the hospitality of local landowners, must have been a great impetus for those who thought of settling here permanently. Indeed, the very first Jews who arrived in Makó had come from the County of Pest. The first census of the Jews of Makó in 1773 shows that their community consisted of 158 people and that the most common trade among the men was dealing in raw hides. Most of these retail dealers first had been hawkers of goods or itinerant peddlers with one or two horses and lived in rather poor conditions.¹⁶

It was especially after the turn of the century, following the Napoleonic Wars, that Makó became an important provincial market center. Despite the great flood of 1821 and the great plague of 1831, the Jewish population of Makó rose in 1836 to 1,120, of whom 144 owned houses. In 1828 there were already as many as six Pulitzer families residing in the town.² Outside Makó, many of the surrounding villages were also gradually populated by Jews who arrived as newcomers from more or less distant places. By the middle of the nineteenth century, with the growth in population, at least a dozen of the neighboring villages and towns, such as Apátfalva, Csanád, Hódmezővásárhely, Csongrád, and Arad, also had several Pulitzer families living among their Jews.⁵

In the last century, the Jewish community of Makó, its houses occupying a fairly centrally situated section of the town, had a reputation for its traditional religious spirit. It always had devout and learned rabbis like Salamon Ullman, whose activity between 1826 and 1863 earned a national reputation for the community. The Jewish tradesmen of Makó, who had managed to accumulate a certain amount of capital, regularly turned up with their produce (mainly grain and wool) in the greater trading centers to sell them to wholesale merchants. In the period between 1800 and 1850, Hungarian Jews—and the community at Makó was no exception in this respect—despite rigid feudal conditions, began to achieve a degree of bourgeois status and emancipation. The Bill of 1840 annulled a great part of the discriminatory measures against Jews, but it still did not declare them full citizens, equal to the other bourgeois inhabitants of the country. At this time the greatest part of the Jewish community strove to achieve linguistic and social integration and to adopt the religious reforms

necessary to reflect this integration. During the revolution and struggle for independence against Austrian Habsburg rule in 1848–49 they took the side of the Hungarian liberation movement. In July 1849, shortly before the collapse, the National Assembly at last enacted the total emancipation of those who were of the “Mosaic religion.”

Pulitzer's Paternal Grandparents

It is unclear whether the first Pulitzers arrived in Makó from Pest County, Nagyvárad, or Moravia. Their first representative there was Baruch Simon Pulitzer, who in the 1773 census appears as a newly married retail dealer in raw hides, with a house of his own.¹⁶ He was born in 1751, but the place of his birth is not known. As is indicated in the censuses of later years, he had several children, one of whom must have been Mihály, Joseph's grandfather.² Baruch Pulitzer, who was among the leaders of the local Chevra Kadisha (Burial Society) of the community, died in about 1830.¹⁷

As compared to the gaps in our knowledge of his ancestry in the eighteenth century, the material available on Joseph Pulitzer's grandparents and parents is quite abundant. His paternal grandfather, Mihály (Michael) Pulitzer, was undoubtedly born at Makó, sometime between 1779 and 1784. According to the death register of the Jews of Pest, where he died, he died on April 22, 1870, “at the age of 88.”⁵ He lived a long and active life as a well-to-do merchant trading in agricultural produce. His wife, Joseph's grandmother, was a native of Csongrád, not too far from Makó and to the northwest, where several Jews from Pest County had formerly settled. Rosalie Schwab (her maiden name) was born either in 1788 or 1789 and died in Pest on January 5, 1863, “at the age of 75.”⁵

Mihály Pulitzer, as listed in a census of Jewish taxpayers at Makó from the year 1809, had a tenant, a maid, and a servant in his household.² In 1816, by way of an exchange for a house and 2,500 florins, he received a plot from the county authority. He established his new residence in the town center of Makó, at No. 2410 Market Place.³ In 1834 he had a new stone house and fence built for himself, which was quite unusual at that time. In the 1820's he was already such a well-to-do merchant with a good reputation that even municipal councillors turned to him for a loan. In the 1830's and 1840's, as a juryman and

member of the community leadership, he was the highest tax-payer among local Jewish shopkeepers.³ As a member of the Jewish community board, he often served as a spokesman and a delegate in his people's affairs in the town, including the demand for emancipation. In July 1849 he was nominated as one of the five councillors to sit on the Municipal Council and represent the Jews of the locality.¹⁶

By all the standards of his time, Mihály Pulitzer was a successful businessman. He had excellent trading contacts with the merchants of Pest (still not officially united with Buda at this time), whose great national fairs he regularly visited. What he sold there was the grain, wool, and tobacco he had bought up locally at Makó and in its vicinity. In turn, for his own shop, he ordered consumer goods like spices, coffee, sugar, pepper, grapes, lemons, and various other products, such as clothes, flannel, candles, matches, and even playing cards. He was part-owner of an oil-stamping press and a mill on the river, and had large quantities of wheat in his barn. He also had a few cattle and horses necessary for the business, with some land outside the town, mainly for the fodder-crops.¹ By the mid-1850's he had moved his permanent residence from Makó to Pest, though he kept the house and a vineyard at Makó as his property. He lived there in the Jewish district, at No. 1 Zwei Mohrengasse (Két szerecsen Street) as a widower, until the end of his life.⁵

Joseph Pulitzer and His Siblings

One of the most important source materials relating to Joseph Pulitzer was found in the Csongrád County Archives. It is a copy of the birth and death register of the Jewish community at Makó, from the last century. According to this register, József (Joseph) Pulitzer was undoubtedly born on April 10, 1847, at Makó. He was circumcised on April 17. Consequently, the *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon* [Hungarian Jewish Encyclopedia], the *Encyclopaedia Americana*, and the *Jewish Encyclopedia* are definitely wrong in giving Budapest as his place of birth. So, too, is the inscription in the museum of the Statue of Liberty in New York (Pulitzer launched the fund-raising campaign for the construction of its pedestal) and the Hungarian book in the *Karriérek* series, the first naming Budapest, the latter Miskolc as his place of birth. His parents, as indicated in the register, were: Fülöp Puliczter

(sic), a “trader,” as father, and Elize Berger, as mother. The sponsors were a certain Anna Brüll, a relative, and Salamon Ullman, the local rabbi.³

According to the register of births, Joseph was the fourth child in the family. Both Seitz, and Swanberg, in his excellent monograph, *Pulitzer*, mistakenly assert that there were four children in the family, placing Joseph as second, after Louis and before Albert and “Irma.” In fact, the first child was really Lajos Lázár (Louis), born on January 7, 1840. The second and third children were Borbála (Barbara), who was born in 1842 and died on March 20, 1847, a few weeks before Joseph’s birth, and Breindel, born in 1845, who lived only thirteen months until June 24, 1846. Both little girls died of a then incurable disease. The fifth Pulitzer child was Anna Fanny Franciska, born in 1849, who lived eleven years until her death on July 13, 1860. Albert, who was born in 1851 and later went to America after Joseph, died in Vienna in 1909. The seventh child was a boy named Gabriel Gábor, born in 1853, who died in 1855, also at a very early age. All these children were born in Makó. But later, after the family’s move to Pest, an eighth and a ninth child were born as well, Helene and Arnold, the latter living to the age of nine months when he died on October 26, 1856.³

The eldest boy, Lajos, as verified by documents, first went to the Jewish elementary school at Makó. Then, each year from 1852 on, he was taken by his parents to an “economic school” in Vienna until he died on June 7, 1856, in Pest. His untimely death was caused by tuberculosis at the age of sixteen.¹ He had probably been considered as the would-be successor in his father’s business. Interestingly, however, no mention was ever made in the registers or other documents of a sister named Irma in the Pulitzer family.

Joseph Pulitzer’s Parents

The father, whose real name was Fülöp (Philip) Pulitzer, and who sometimes signed his name as Puliczer (but never “Ignác” or “Frigyes” and “Politzer” as Kende and Lengyel state in their books *Magyarok Amerikában* and *Americans from Hungary*) was also born in Makó in 1811. The earliest official record about him is the copy of a certificate in the minute-book of the Municipal Council of Makó, dated May 26,

1841. As a recommendation, it is stated there that "Fülöp, son and partner of the merchant Mihály Pulitzer, trading in wool, tobacco, and other things, has a house and shop of his own and is a sober, peaceful man of goodwill, an honest and popular trader."¹ Fülöp was not the only child of Mihály: he had several brothers and sisters. His brothers, Mihály-Mayer, Simon, and Áron, all became businessmen, the latter two having served as members of the National Guard in the Revolution of 1848. The eldest brother, Mihály-Mayer, was also a "respected tradesman of high reputation at Makó" and moved his residence to Pest in about 1850. The names of his sisters were Katalin, Róza, and Josefa ("Pepi").¹

Fülöp Pulitzer was a tall, intelligent man with dark brown hair, a moustache, a beard, and a hooked nose, according to his description in contemporary records of passports issued to him. He was a well-trained businessman. In 1838 he married Elize Louise Berger, Joseph's mother, who also came from a family of Jewish traders in Pest. Born there in 1823, a tall, dark-haired woman with a round face and blue eyes, she may have been a "beauty" but she did not prove to be a clever enough successor in her husband's business when troubles came years later.¹ There were scores of Bergers in the Pest of the last century, and which part of the empire her ancestors migrated from is still to be discovered. What is known with certainty about Elize Berger is that she came from a family of Jews and was not born in Austria proper, as asserted by several biographies. The Bergers were given permission to settle permanently in Pest in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. The name of Lazar Berger, Joseph's maternal grandfather, was mentioned for the first time in the conscription of "nontolerated" Jews in Pest from the year 1811. In a few years his family became "tolerated," with a residence in Kivály Street. According to the Jewish conscription of 1857, Ludwig Berger, brother of Joseph's mother, was a married merchant and living in Pest.⁴

In the early 1840's Fülöp Pulitzer became quite independent in business. In 1843 he bought himself and his family a middle-sized plot for 3,000 florins. He established his new trading enterprise in the town center of Makó by having a new house with outbuildings built on the plot right across from the County Hall.³ It was here, at No. 1637 Megyeház (Uri) Street, that on a spring day in 1847 their son Joseph saw the world for the first time. By 1844 Fülöp had already been

trading in agricultural produce "in large quantities." Just like his father, he also bought up locally grown tobacco, grain, onions, and wool to sell to other wholesale merchants in various parts of the country. He ordered spices and sugar for his shop and occasionally stored fish in his warehouse. Before his business trips he often turned to the magistrate for letters of recommendation, and it is obvious that he always got the best certificates, usually describing him as a punctual taxpayer, a sober and honest merchant who enjoyed great respect in town and was a "man of excellent means."¹

In the late 1840's he had servants of his own, and went on business trips with his own wagons and horses, whose fodder was grown on his own piece of land just outside the town. Sometimes he advertised hay for sale. During the Revolution of 1848—49 he was food-purveyor to the insurgent troops in southern Hungary.¹ At this time he also served as juryman in the Jewish community.¹⁶ Following the defeat of the struggle for independence, the Austrian victors imposed punishments on Jewish communities for their allegiance to the cause of freedom, and the invading troops punished the Jews of Makó, too, by looting their homes and shops. But Fülöp Pulitzer, though two of his brothers had served in the revolutionary army, was clever enough to avoid disaster: he went on with his trading activity as a military food-purveyor for the Austrian troops as well. In the 1850's he remained a successful, wealthy merchant who still often went on business trips in the Austrian Empire, occasionally accompanying his eldest son, Lajos, to an "economic school" in Vienna.¹

The Pulitzer family did not suffer any kind of privation at this time, and little Joseph must have had a really carefree and cheerful boyhood. A private tutor was even hired to come and teach the children at home.²⁷ Their father, with the help of loans from the council, made new investments in his business on a large scale. He frequently visited the great national fairs in Pest with his merchandises. Pest was then already considered the capital of Hungary, especially from an economic point of view. By 1854, Fülöp Pulitzer had become the "foremost merchant" in the town of Makó.¹

The Pulitzer Family in Pest

In the spring of 1855 the Pulitzers made an important decision: in possession of an excellent letter of recommendation from the chief

magistrate of Makó, they applied to the council of the city of Pest for permission to settle there permanently.¹ Joseph was exactly eight years old when this happened. His father, in the petition addressed to the council, gave several reasons why they had decided to move to the capital. These included the large-scale increase of his trade in agricultural produce, his ongoing business contacts with many of the merchants of Pest, regular presence at the national fairs, his stock and shipments of agricultural produce, and the fact that his wife was a native of Pest, and that her relatives were tradesmen of high repute in the markets of Pest.⁴ In that same year, after receiving permission to settle, the Pulitzers sold their fine house, and having fulfilled their taxation obligations, they left Makó for good. The incentives for the family's move to Pest with five young children were far from anything like being threatened by bankruptcy or the father's illness and wish to retire. Simply, they had a desire for greater chances of prosperity in business, and they followed suit after some other members of the family, such as Mihály Mayer, Fülöp's brother, who had already successfully taken up residence and established themselves in Pest, which was not just an economic and cultural center of the country but also a center for Hungarian Jewry.

On January 1, 1856, Fülöp Pulitzer reopened his business in Pest, extending it by trading in raw products as well. The family first took up residence at No. 6 Waitzner Street, at the Golden Stern Inn, which was near the Jewish area of Pest, where Joseph's grandparents lived, and quite close to Ujvástartér, i.e., the New Market Place, where the great national fairs were held. Pulitzer's enterprise soon held out promises of a kind of prosperity never experienced before. His turnover for the first year was 90,000 florins. In a short while he was able to do business on a large scale again and managed to raise the necessary trading fund requested from tradesmen who wished their firm to be incorporated. Early the next year, following a thorough auditing of his business affairs by the authorities, his financial condition and commercial expertise were found substantial enough to have his enterprise registered. At the same time he became a member of the Commercial and Industrial Chamber of Pest. No doubt, the turnover of 84,000 florins that he achieved in the first three months of the year 1857 was proof of a new upswing in business and indirectly in the family's wealth.⁴

Despite their sorrow over the deaths of their eldest son, Lajos, and

their youngest child, Arnold, in 1856, the family was well off, and Fülöp and Louise Pulitzer probably did their best to provide their children with everything they could afford, including a good education. As no trace of the Pulitzer children has been found in the still-existing school registers of Pest, it is likely that Joseph continued to receive a private elementary education.

Provisions of Fülöp Pulitzer's Will

A serious disaster affected the family when Fülöp Pulitzer suddenly became ill with tuberculosis and business had to be neglected. At this time the family had rented a different flat, at No. 2 Göttergasse (Bálvány Street), in the fashionable Leopoldstadt district of Pest, not far from their previous residence near the New Market Place. Everything seemed to collapse at once when the father died on July 16, 1858, at the age of forty-seven.⁵ Fülöp Pulitzer's will was officially opened on June 27, 1859, almost a year following his death, in the presence of his widow and her brother. It was written on June 22, 1855, at the time when the family had just moved from Makó to Pest. It was written in Fülöp's own handwriting throughout and signed by him. The document, as was customarily requested, was written in the German language, in Gothic script. The handwriting itself, too, reflects a highly intellectual mind and an educated person's good command of German.⁴

The will suggests uncertainty and worry about the family's prospects in case of trouble. It was made at a time when Fülöp Pulitzer had only just settled with his family in their new residence in the capital city of Hungary, when he was about to reestablish himself as a new merchant there, and when recent political and economic restrictions had been imposed on Jews, such as the prohibition of their purchasing any real estate. All these circumstances, plus fears of an untimely death and consequently about the doubtful fate of the children and the family fortune, are reflected in the will. Though it was written in a condition "sound in body and mind," the father's chief anxiety, that he would die while all his children were still underage, proved, unfortunately, to have been well-grounded. All things considered, what the will reflects indeed is the father's philanthropic feelings and an overwhelming fondness for his family.

In the first place, Fülöp Pulitzer left to the local poorhouse and the Jewish hospital 10 florins each. In the second paragraph of the will, he bequeathed each of his children—"Lajos, József, Albert, Franciska and Helene"—their compulsory share of the inheritance, with the appointment of their mother to be "their guardian and curator" while they were still minors. His "beloved wife née Louise Berger" was given right to the free administration of the children's share and to become a beneficiary of it, with the reservation that she would always need the approval of her actions by either Fülöp's brother Mihály-Mayer Pulitzer or her brother Ludwig Berger. Fülöp obviously chose this solution because he thought that the compulsory shares themselves, being hardly enough for education and upkeep, would in this way accrue a greater income than if the total inheritance was divided and the children placed under public guardianship.

As regards Louise Berger, she was named "heiress general" in the will, with the condition that "she may enjoy the fruits of her own share only." And, despite the fact that she received the right "to administer and make use of the property falling to her to the best of her knowledge," she was again bound in her actions by the approval and agreement of either of the two brothers already mentioned or of Pulitzer's aunt, Rosalia Hoffman. Nothing was left in the last will to any of the other Pulitzer relatives, namely, Fülöp's brother or sisters.

Economic Privation and Emigration to America

After Fülöp Pulitzer's death, the family business went nearly totally bankrupt. No reserve-fund seems to have remained, and neither of the brothers appointed in the will seems to have been able or willing to help the widow. Louise Pulitzer's taxes grew so great that in a few months she was unable to pay them and a lien was taken out on her property. The family went into debt and plunged into poverty. Finally, following petitions requesting that the payment terms be rescheduled, the widow was granted permission by the revenue office to settle her tax arrears in monthly installments from February 1859.⁴

The fate of the Pulitzers after these events remains relatively obscure. Along with his brother and sister, Joseph, at age eleven the eldest child in the family, became an orphan whose support and further education in these circumstances must have been a real ordeal for his

widowed mother. Nevertheless, by some Hungarian newspaper accounts, Mrs. Pulitzer was said to have continued business activities by running a small flour shop while Joseph attended Hampl's Economic School.²⁶ Yet another stroke of bad fortune befell the family when Joseph's little sister Anna Fanny suddenly died in July 1860, at the age of eleven. At this time the family, still poverty-stricken, occupied the same home in Göttergasse that their father had established.⁵ The fact that Joseph left home at seventeen against his mother's will to become a soldier in the United States may well have been the result of an effort to lighten the burdens of the family as well as the outcome of some sort of disagreement with his stepfather, Max Blau. Joseph's failed efforts to enter the armies of various European countries are well-known from Hungarian and American sources published at the beginning of this century. Albert, his younger brother, shortly followed suit; he too sailed to America, and also became a newspaperman.

After reading in biographies about Joseph's excellent knowledge of German after his immigration to the United States, one might ask why his German was so good if his mother was not even Austrian-born. The answer is that after the defeat of the struggle for independence in 1849, the whole of Hungary was brought under the total political dictatorship of the Austrian government. Even though Hungary had already been a part of the Habsburg Empire, oppression became so strong after the Revolution that the native Hungarian language was not even acknowledged as official. The German language was introduced as obligatory in all offices, schools, and other public institutions throughout the country. In such circumstances it would have been much more difficult for an open-minded young man to ignore German than to master it.

The Pulitzer Vienna connection, then, must have been on the father's side. Earlier, about the middle of the century, three Pulitzers went from Hungary to study medicine at the University of Vienna. Theodore and Ignatio Pulitzer published their doctoral dissertations there in the Latin language.²³ Adam Politzer became the most famous of them, a well-known otologist and professor of medicine in Vienna, author of several studies.²⁵ They were probably closely related to one another, the latter being a cousin of Joseph's.

Joseph Pulitzer's birthplace at Makó is no longer visible in its original form. The family house was rebuilt by one of its new owners for

the purposes of creating a post office in 1895. The one-story building, which served as a post office until the 1920's, is still standing on the site and is the same size as the one-time Pulitzer residence. It is now No. 4 Dózsa György Street, opposite the old County Hall—the last witness to Joseph Pulitzer's childhood.

Sources

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