



The History of the Craftsmen's Association of Cluj – 1860–1945

(Abstract)

The first volume of the *Studies in Industrial History* series presents the history of one of Cluj's most significant, yet today largely forgotten, associations: the Craftsmen's Association, covering the period from 1860 to 1945. The professional and cultural organisation of the craftsmen of Cluj played an important role not only in the city's cultural and social life, but also in its economic development. One of Cluj's longest-standing associations began its activity in 1860 under the name Craftsmen's Reading Society, and from 1874 onward continued its work as the Craftsmen's Association of Cluj. Although originally established as an association for craftsmen, over the years and decades it also came to include citizens belonging to other professional groups – such as clerks, merchants, teachers, doctors, and lawyers – who likewise found their place within the organisation. Drawing on contemporary documents and periodicals, the book traces and presents the life and activities of the association over the course of 85 years. Beyond representing the economic interests of the artisan community, the association also sought to provide its members with opportunities for professional development, education, and refined leisure. Through its Financial Credit Cooperative, it provided affordable loans to those in need, while also operating a retirement home for “aged craftsmen”. In addition to the aforementioned activities, the Craftsmen's Association of Cluj played a vital role in fostering a sense of community and, particularly during the First World War and the subsequent period of territorial transition, in reinforcing patriotic sentiment and national identity.

The history of the Craftsmen's Association can be divided into four distinct periods, each marked by the tenure of a different president:

- The Craftsmen's Association under the presidency of Ferenc Krémer (1869–1874)

During this period, several significant achievements were realised, including the establishment and continual enrichment of the library, the founding of the industrial division, participation in the Vienna World Exposition and the National

Industrial Exhibition in Kecskemét, as well as the creation of the Credit Fund. This period may be regarded as the association's childhood and youth, marked by the initial phases of its founding and transformation, alongside the continual struggles inherent in its search for direction.

– The Craftsmen's Association during the presidency of Sámuel Benigni (1875–1903)

The greatest achievement of this period was the construction of the association's own headquarters. Designed by Cluj architect Frigyes Maetz in a historicist style incorporating Neo-Renaissance elements, the newly built, single-storey headquarters remains one of the main architectural highlights of the Main Square to this day. Under the presidency of Sámuel Benigni, the Craftsmen's Association also enjoyed a vibrant cultural life. The library, which initially comprised only a few hundred volumes, had grown to boast some 3,000 titles by the end of the 19th century.

– The Craftsmen's Association during the presidency of József Hevesi (1903–1933)

Following Sámuel Benigni, József Hevesi, a master cabinetmaker and manufacturer who had already been actively involved in the association, assumed the presidency. One of his first and most significant achievements as leader was the realisation of the long-discussed establishment of a retirement home for impoverished elderly craftsmen, a project in gestation since 1876. The multi-storey retirement home, designed by Károly Reményik and erected at 22 Rudolf Street, was solemnly inaugurated on 19 March 1905.

– The Craftsmen's Association during the presidency of Mihály Rátz (1933–1945)

Mihály Rátz, a master builder, was the final democratically elected president of the Craftsmen's Association. He led the organisation for approximately twelve years, from 1933 until his forcible removal, striving to operate and sustain the association in accordance with its original statutes.

In addition to presenting the history of the Craftsmen's Association, the volume includes detailed biographies of its four most influential figures – namely, the four presidents – as well as a list of individuals mentioned throughout the text, accompanied by key biographical data. Furthermore, it offers a chronological summary of the major events in the association's history.