

History of the Library



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[1] Hungary's National Széchényi Library was founded in 1802. It owes its establishment and name to a highly patriotic Hungarian aristocrat, Count Ferenc Széchényi. At the end of the 18th century, he sought out Hungarian books in Hungary and abroad, brought them together into one single collection and donated his collection to the nation in 1802. In the following year the public library, available to all, was opened in Pest.

Ferenc Széchényi's patriotic deed aroused a nation-wide response. The entire nation was mobilized, making donations as a personal contribution, to ensure the fullest possible national library. The Diet (session of the National Assembly) placed the institution on a broader foundation. In 1808 it set up the Hungarian National Museum to collect the historical, archeological and natural relics of Hungary and incorporated the library founded earlier by Ferenc Széchényi within this frame. This was the origin of the institution which, for approximately two centuries, was the common store of written, printed and objective relics of the Hungarian past.

The Classicist building of the Hungarian National Museum was built from the generosity and sacrifice of the nation and the Library and other departments of the Museum moved into it in 1846-1847. It was not until 1949 that the Library was separated from the Museum and once again it became an independent institution under its current name of National Széchényi Library. It was moved into its new and present headquarters in Buda Castle in 1985.

The function of the national library was clearly defined right from the start and it has remained practically unchanged up until now. National Széchényi Library has the task of collecting:

- all works published within the borders of Hungary at the given time, in whatever language they may be written;
- all works published in Hungarian;
- all works written by Hungarian authors, or with the collaboration of Hungarians, not in Hungarian and outside Hungary;
- all works published abroad in foreign languages with Hungarian aspects.

The legal deposit system ensures the fullest possible collection of documents published in Hungary. It is compulsory for producers and publishing houses to provide National Széchényi Library with free copies of their all-time publications.

Aiming at a comprehensive coverage, National Széchényi Library collects publications and prints of any kind produced in Hungary, receiving two deposit copies of each, non-book materials (sound recordings, video materials, documents in electronic forms, etc.), works published abroad in Hungarian language, written by Hungarian authors, translated from Hungarian or related to Hungary, as well as manuscripts in Hungarian or related to Hungary. In addition to the material listed above, which is dubbed "hungarica", the Library also collects literature connected with other Finno-Ugrian people, since the Hungarian language belongs to this family of languages, and also literature related to the neighboring countries.

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