



HOUSE of HUNGARY, Inc.

California Public Benefit Corporation

2159 Pan American Plaza, Balboa Park, San Diego, CA 92101.



Proposal to mount a memorial plaque to Sándor Márai in Balboa Park

House of Hungary, Inc., proposes to offer a plaque for display in Balboa Park, commemorating internationally renowned author Sándor Márai, who spent the last decade of his life in San Diego. Two display options are offered, but House of Hungary is ready to work with the Balboa Park Committee and with San Diego Park and Recreation to determine a mutually acceptable display solution.

The Honoree

Sándor Márai (1900 – 1989), born in Hungary, is one of the most significant authors of the 20th century. He was internationally renowned during the years before World War II, and short-listed for the Nobel Prize. He suffered for his humanist moral and political principles, being as strongly anti-communist after the war as he had been anti-fascist before and during it. Although he viewed exile from his native soil – more importantly, from his native tongue – as akin to a death sentence, he saw it as his only recourse, since if he remained in Hungary, he would be allowed neither to write according to his conscience, nor to keep silent. Upon his departure in 1948, the Hungarian government pulped his books, and even mention of his name became an actionable offense. Unlike later dissident authors such as the Russian Solzhenitsyn, his reputation went into eclipse during his exile.

After 1948, he alternated residing in Italy and New York, but finally settled in San Diego in 1980. Here, he lived at 2820 Sixth Avenue, directly across the street from Balboa Park, where he spent much time. In San Diego, he completed his magnum opus, the five-novel cycle *The Garren Family's Creation*, as well as the concluding volumes of his diaries (begun in 1943). The final volume, in particular, has been called “perhaps one of the greatest human and literary documents of the twentieth century” by Nobel Prize-winning author Imre Kertész.

By the time of Márai's death, the Hungarian political climate was thawing rapidly. Indeed, in 1988 the Communist government even offered to republish his entire life's work and to invite him to return, with honors – but Márai, a man of uncompromising principle, refused to allow publication as long as a single Soviet soldier remained on Hungarian soil. Ravaged by untreatable cancer, having lost his wife and son, and refusing to become a burden to strangers, he ended his life in 1989, just months before Hungary's first free elections and two years before the departure of the Soviet occupiers.

Márai's reputation has grown explosively since his death: first in Hungary, then in Western Europe, and since then worldwide. About 225 editions of his books are now available in nearly 40 languages, from Albanian to Vietnamese; in the U.S., Knopf is engaged in publishing of all his novels in English translation, with four published to date and another in press. The first of these, Embers, became a runaway best seller worldwide and was adapted for the stage by eminent playwright Christopher Hampton; it enjoyed a very successful London run, starring Jeremy Irons. Every sign points to a continuing increase in critical esteem and readership for Márai's work.

At a previous meeting of the Balboa Park Committee, Márai's stature as one of the most important authors to have called San Diego home was generally accepted.

The Plaque

The plaque was commissioned by the Sándor Márai Foundation in Hungary and awarded to an eminent Hungarian sculptor, Ms. Márta Csikai. Costs were borne by the Foundation, the House of Hungary, and the Hungarian Foreign Ministry's cultural fund. The bronze plaque shows a relief of the author as an elderly man.

Monuments in Public Parks

Plaques and statues honoring literary and artistic figures abound in U.S. public parks, from Central Park in New York to Forest Park in St. Louis, to Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Central Park is also notable for devoting an area, directly across the street from his last residence, to John Lennon – a precedent for the second installation option given below (of a much more modest scale than Central Park's Strawberry Fields). Central Park also features an astonishing number of monuments to literary figures – including some obscure New York authors (Frances Hodgson Burnett, Fitz-Greene Halleck) and many more who had no direct relation to New York, including William Shakespeare, Hans Christian Andersen, Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns, and Friedrich Schiller. It even honors fictional characters, with monuments to Alice and to Mother Goose.

Balboa Park, itself, features numerous plaques, honoring local figures of merit (e.g., Kate O. Sessions, Agoston Haraszthy), world figures with little connection to San Diego (Princess Diana), sister city relations ("San Diego, the Beautiful", near the Tea Garden) and milestones of human culture (the Babylonian proclamation of human rights, outside the House of Iran).

Proposed Locations

House of Hungary offers two proposed installation sites for consideration. However, these are not exhaustive or exclusive, and House of Hungary will readily work to find a mutually acceptable site.

1. Mounted on the west wall of House of Hungary

The plaque can easily be mounted at eye level (precise height to be agreed upon with the City) on the west wall of House of Hungary, where it would be easily visible, yet not overbearing. The concrete patio on the north side of the building would be extended around the corner in such a way as to provide access compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

2. Mounted on a stone plinth in Balboa Park, across the street from the former Márai residence

The former Márai residence at 2820 Sixth Avenue, between Olive and Palm, fronts the western part of Balboa Park. A broad lawn is broken up by groves of trees and bisected by a concrete walkway along a north-south axis. A majestic line of pine trees extends from west to east, opposite the residence. A suitable location for a simple stone plinth (material, footprint, and height to be determined in consultation with the City) might be just west of the walkway, under the pine trees. In this way, it would not interfere with the open lawn areas used as recreational spaces.

Installation, Maintenance and Conservation Costs

House of Hungary proposes to defray installation, routine maintenance and conservation costs of the monument for a period no less than five years from the installation date.

Figures



Figure 1. Proposed west wall mounting location for the plaque; a second west wall location would be to mount it at the same height on the chimney, where it would not be fronted by shrubbery.



Figure 2. Panorama, looking north, of the walkway and pine grove near the Márai residence, where the plaque might be mounted on a short plinth.

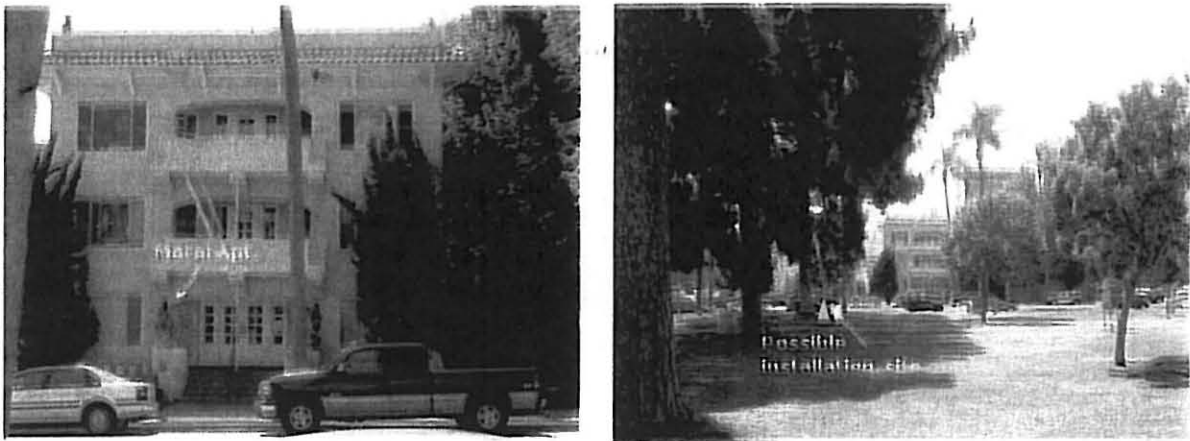


Figure 3. Left: the Márai apartment at 2820 Sixth Avenue; right: a view showing the pine grove and possible installation site in relation to the apartment.

Prepared by Peter V. Czipott Ph.D., chairman of the Sándor Márai Committee,
respectfully submitted by dr. Zoltán Gidófalvi, president of the House of Hungary.

San Diego, 2/11/2010

Zoltán Gidófalvi