

## The History of the Golden Bull 1699-2004

First of all, we need to disprove a misbelief concerning the name of the hotel: The Golden Bull Hotel did not get its name of a bull; but of a famous citizen of Debrecen, Bálint Bika, who hired and managed the hotel 300 years ago. The “Bikas” (Bulls) were well-known family of the town. They dealt with farming and stock-raising; the census ranked the family among the wealthiest ones.

Let us turn back to the beginnings of the hotel’s history, which is connected to the famous, medieval fairs of Debrecen. Visitors namely crowded to these fairs; the Greek from the East, the Polish and the Russians from the North, the Serbians and the Romanians from the South, the Germans from the West. However, Debrecen had great foreign traffic not just during the fairs, but on the days before and after, as the commercial roads leading to Erdély and to the North ran here. The guests who arrived into the town were accommodated at houses. The town leadership aimed to cease these conditions, when they decided to establish an inn, on the spot of the present hotel. There were only four bedrooms, a taproom and a host’s flat constructed. In 1701, count Antal Eszterházy, the later “kuruc” general was among the first guests.

Within a few years, the town’s first hostelry developed so much that the number of the rooms was multiplied, a floor of rooms was built above the ground-floor; even a dance-hall was constructed.

The iron sign-board representing the Bull was made in the latest 1700’s, which has been one of the hotel’s emblems.

In 1848 the inn received a new name according to the order of the imperial commissar; since then it was called “Nádor inn”.

During the war of independence, General Bem also stayed here, who spoke often of the “Pika” inn of Debrecen, where he could sleep well at night, and he got good meals. General Sándor Nagy and Prince Commander-in-Chief Paskievics also turned up in the rest-house.

In this period, the 15 bedrooms of the inn reached capacity not only at the fairs, but in all seasons of the year. In the seventies of the nineteenth century, when railway service had started up, it became appreciable that the Bull had very little roominess. The city entrusted architect Imre Steindl with the completion of the hotel’s new design.

In August 1881/4 the new hotel was finished, and a year later a decorative café was opened for the public. Leading writer Mór Jókai, who stayed in Debrecen that time, was also present at the ceremony.

The outlanders, who arrived in Debrecen spoke in glowing terms of the comfort and exquisite cuisine of the hotel. No week lasted without social gatherings, balls.

The new, comfortable hotel building, the restaurant, the café served public properly, but the steadily growing foreign traffic and the cumulative claims again highlighted the idea of the Bull’s further expansion. So Hermann Fehér, who hired and managed the hotel successfully for years, had the café extended. They placed a marble table here – its society made up of public figures, called themselves public-opinion-circle. Endre Ady also visited the café willingly when he was a journalist in Debrecen.

Several famous people turned up in the hotel that time. Among others, the son of Lajos Kossuth, Ferenc returning from Italy, who saw Debrecen during his state-wide round tour; Archduke József Dóczy and his attendance also stayed in the hotel.

The two-storied Hotel Bull was in its glory in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Pál Móricz, the great writer refers to it in his book titled "Hungarian Laments": "In the famous Bull inn of Debrecen, the wealthiest Hungarians of Tisza county held their unforgettable dear gatherings, now and then a reformed regional banquet, an inauguration of the lord lieutenant, a party meeting of independence, the improvised balls at great fairs, and the real ones at carnivals – interlarded with honest, warm, fraternal pledges. The balls of the great fairs were significant occasions for the young ones to become acquainted with each other."

According to the lease contracted with the city, András Németh and the widow of Lajos Vilmos ran the hotel with high proficiency, and they enhanced its reputation.

They aimed to have the most beautiful fittings, to fill the cellar with the best drinks (French champagne, liqueur, brandy) in the Bull with a great past. There were times, when stores exceeded even the amount in the Gellért Grand Hotel's stores.

András Némethi had electricity installed, which meant real experience to the guests, as quite a few provincial hotels could be proud of any power supply. In the summer of 1911 the town of Debrecen accepted the suggestions for a share company established on the building of the Golden Bull. Alfréd Hajós and János Villányi engineers from Pest presented the artistic plans of the new hotel. 192 rooms with the finest fittings, on the ground-floor a café, restaurants and an apartment house were worked up. Furthermore, they built up the banquet hall, the public bath and the theatre as well.

The final cost of buildings came to 2,651,825 crowns. The noted poet, Árpád Tóth opines this in the Great News of Debrecen: "To be sure, the building of the Bull is no loss, the town receives a cosmopolitan palace in place of the old-fashioned inn."

The present building was designed by our Olympic champion, Alfréd Hajós. At the age of 18, he won two gold medals in 100 ms and 1200 ms crawl, in 1896, at the first Olympic Games of the modern era. Let us take a little by-pass to commemorate him.

We can call Alfréd Hajós a universal genius as well, as, besides swimming he massed champion medals in hurdling, discus-throwing; moreover, he practised journalism – he was the columnist and Sporting World editor of the "Pesti Napló", and, as it is well-known, he designed buildings, too.

Being an architect, he received as many national and international recognitions, as he got during his sporting career. His "Grandiose Hungarian Stadium" plan was rewarded with a silver medal in the architectural category. But we can owe for example the swimming pool of Margit Island, the thermal bath of Hajdúszoboszló and the grammar school buildings in Lőcse and Kőszeg to Alfréd Hajós.

The Golden Bull, which opened in 1915, was out and away more beautiful and bigger than it was previously. This was the first impression of the journalists of Debrecen's new touristic institution. Even Miklós Horthy, the first Hungarian governor visited the reborn Golden Bull hotel.

In the years of the World War II Debrecen became a real military centre. Because of this, the new hotel filled up with soldiers day by day. However, some rooms of the Golden Bull were managed to separate for civil hospitality purposes.

In 1948 the hotel was nationalized. Under government management the hotel was developed along, smaller sections and larger conference halls were designed, and a medical centre was set up.

Then, on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 1989, the Cívis Hotel and Gastronomy Ltd. was established. The firm organized its selection of services on a brand new basis. It emphasized product development, communication together with education and further trainings. It brought round the Golden Bull Voluntary School, which has got 200 students at present.

In 1994 the firm was about to privatize. The leaders and employees of the firm together won the invited tender. The hotel company has been working successfully since then.

In fine, let us recall, what statesmen, famous people had turned up within the walls stained with historical past, what events happend here worth mentioning!

- In 1966 the inventor of the “Sabin-drops” – Professor Sabin
- In 1984 Kohl, chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany
- In 1992 the hotel made home for the Chess team European Championship
- The government lead by József Antall held an outlaid session here for 5 days.
- On 11<sup>th</sup> December 1993 Andárs Sütő writer from Erdély
- Vranitzky Austrian chancellor
- Late celebrated actress, Zita Szeleczky

Besides public figures renowned artists has turned up within the walls mellowed by age. Just a few names without aiming at completeness: Zsigmond Móricz, Gábor Oláh, Árpád Tóth, Ferenc Karinthy, Mari Jászai, Hanna Honthy, Sári Fedák, Klára Kúri, Emília Márkus, Lujza Blaha, Mária Sulyok, Lili Neményi, Árpád Horváth theatre manager, Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály.

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