

University closes doors forever

By WILF BENNETT

A dramatic chapter of B.C.'s—and the world's—educational history will come to an end next month when the last 23 students of the University of Sopron School of Forestry graduate at UBC and the doors of the "school from across the sea" are closed forever.

Last night it was with mixed feelings of pride and sadness that the last 23 emigre Hungarian students held their graduation dinner and ball.

"I believe I am not conceited when I say that our exodus shall be written on the pages of history to provide example and inspiration for future generations," said Dean Kalman Roller, who led the move from Sopron, Hungary, and who has headed it through-out its UBC life.

"Canada's reception of these refugees will everlastingly remain a bright page in her history. It is an immensely positive contribution to the whole of humanity."

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Dean Roller will remain on the UBC forestry faculty for research and teaching.

Closing of the Sopron faculty ends a 150-year-old institution, noted for decades in Europe as a training ground for foresters.

A plaque commemorating Sopron Forestry Faculty's four years at UBC will be unveiled by Dean Koller and President Norman MacKenzie at International House April 24. It is being presented by the Hungarian

students, in appreciation of the assistance given them.

The actual migration began in November, 1956, when Soviet tanks rolled into Hungary. All the Sopron University students were in the revolution against the Russian invaders, and had to flee across the border into Austria.

The decision to come to Canada, and to B.C., was made in Vienna by Hon. Jack Pickersgill, then Canada's minister of immigration, who was studying the refugee problem there. Knowing that Canada needed foresters, he phoned Hon. James Sinclair, then fisheries minister, with the suggestion they be transferred to UBC.

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Mr. Sinclair phoned UBC President Norman MacKenzie, who said he was enthusiastic about the idea, but who explained that the university was already trying to deal with a critical problem of overcrowding because of its booming student population.

President MacKenzie, however, appealed to the province's forest industry, and within 24 hours H. S. and M. J. Foley of the Powell River Co. had agreed to accommodate the exiled school temporarily in an empty construction camp at Powell River.

UBC Forestry Dean George Allen and Powell River's PRO Fred McNeill flew to Vienna, conferred with Dean Roller, and brought him back to survey the local situation.

As a result, the "refugee

university" sailed for Canada early in 1957. It included 196 students, averaging 20 years of age, and including 12 girls, and 29 professors averaging 35. There were also 21 faculty wives and 50 children.

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They spent the spring and summer in the Powell River camp and moved to the UBC campus for the 1957-58 school year.

Of the original 196 students, 139 have graduated in forestry, including today's 23. The staff of 29 has shrunk to four.

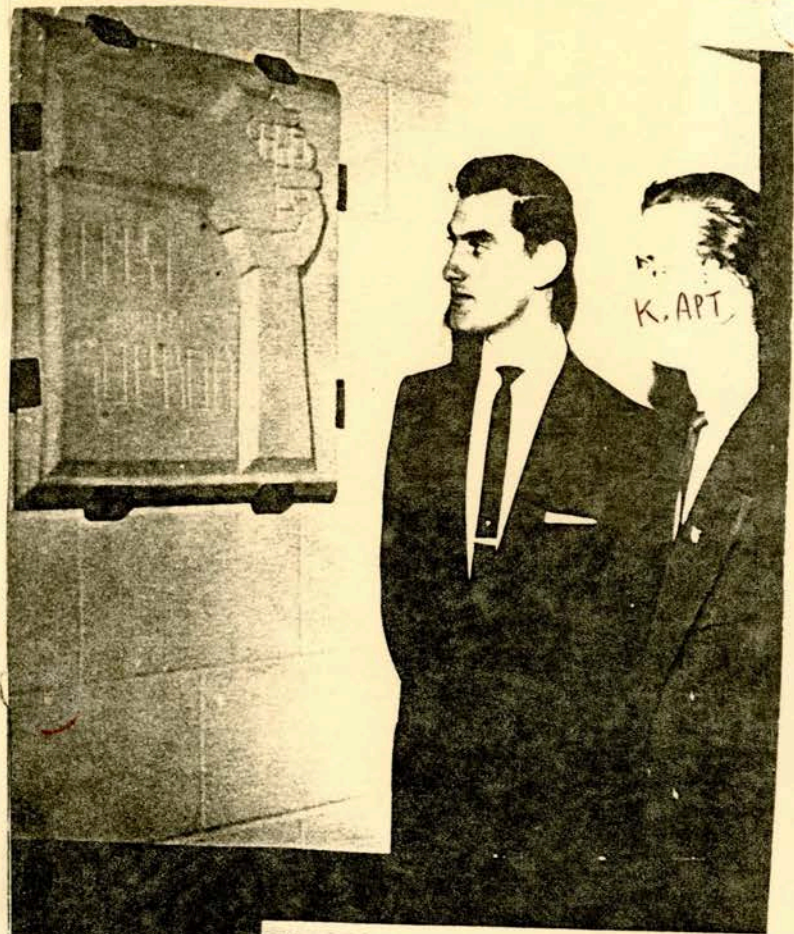
Of the 116 graduates up to this year, 100 are in forestry jobs—90 in B.C. Sixteen are studying for higher degrees, mostly at UBC. One won a graduate scholarship to Washington, one to Yale.

Some dropped out for language or financial reasons, or because they simply couldn't make the grades. Eight have returned to Communist Hungary.

The faculty, also, has gradually dispersed. Some are professors at UBC or other universities, some are in forestry research, some are mining or forestry engineers.

UBC Forestry Dean Allen says: "The Sopron group has been a big success. Close to 85 per cent have graduated, doubling the university's output of foresters. They meet a real need in B.C. They fit in well and their employers speak well of them."

The Sopron Faculty of Forestry has ended. But its last chapter is one that won't soon be forgotten.



"SOPRON MEMORIAL MURAL" 1961
POLYSTONE + IRON
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(MY THIRD WORK)