

György Festetics I

Thanks to György Festetics I, the town of Keszthely became nationally important at the turn of the 18th-19th centuries. The name and good reputation of the town were taken abroad by travellers, writers and scientists. **"At the time all the newspapers were writing about Keszthely and travellers were pouring into the town, just like these days they go to Mecca or they used to go to Rome."**

As a consequence of his enlightened views, he left the army in 1791, thus abandoning his military career and returned to Keszthely, where he opened a new chapter in his own life as well as in that of the town's. The first scientific description of the thermal waters of Hévíz was published with his support (1795). He had the first bathhouse built on the thermal lake.

It is no exaggeration to say that in many aspects György Festetics was the predecessor of István Széchenyi. In 1802, he offered 40,000 Forints to support the military career of the noble youth. He established a secondary school in Csurgó in 1792. Several schools in Keszthely owe their existence to him, too. He was able to prevent the closure of the secondary school that his father established.

He established the Georgikon in 1797 which was internationally significant as it was the first Academy of Agriculture in Europe. The aim was to ensure that there are qualified experts available to professionally manage the estate. He provided a 900 acre land for the institute to be used for educational purposes. He made the institute public in 1801 and even founded a scholarship for talented students.

He moved his grandfather's *stud* from Szentá to Fenékpusztá. Just like his nephew István Széchenyi would later, he emphasized the importance of races, he said it was the best way to test the ability of horses. He used the family's carpentry workshop to build the largest ship that sailed Lake Balaton at the time, the *Phoenix*.

He was also a great patron of culture. He played a very important role in the struggle for the Hungarian language by supporting Hungarian national literature and cultural aspirations. He started the *Helikon celebrations* literary festival, which was first held in February 1817, and which was a gathering of Transdanubian writers and poets as well as local students. He supported the cultural festival and participated in it until his death.

"The death of such a great man is a real loss for the whole country. With his great deeds he shone light for the nobility, he brought enlightenment to the Hungarian nation, helped the lucky growth of science, gave an unrepeatable advancement to agriculture, and by all these he deserved public respect both for himself and for Hungary, home and abroad." (Magyar Kurir, 1828)



Festetics Palace

The former residence of the family acquired its present form at the end of the 1880s. It is one of the largest and most well-preserved aristocratic palaces in Hungary. Inside the building, an aristocratic interior exhibition presents the family's former lifestyle.

Georgikon Farm historical exhibition

An educational farm also belonged to Georgikon. This area, including the original granary, houses exhibitions today.

Helikon Memorial

The Helikon Memorial was erected in the town park at a special ceremony to commemorate the centenary of the Helikon Celebrations started by György I in 1817.

The parish church of Főter (Main square)

After the destruction of St. Martin's parish church in front of the palace, György I made the church on the Main Square the parish of the town. Several members of the Festetics family were buried here.

Statues of György Festetics

Where there is now the sitting statute of the patron count in the Main Square, there used to be originally another statue. It was removed in the 1950s and kept in the basement of the Balaton Museum for a long time. Finally it was erected again in the front garden of the Festetics Palace.

Balaton Museum

Taszió II supported the building of the cultural palace by offering the land and 100,000 bricks. This is the only museum in the area that especially focuses on Lake Balaton and its environment.

Festetics Mausoleum

After the death of his beloved wife Mary Hamilton in 1922, Taszió II began to erect a monument to her memory in the local cemetery. The Mausoleum was completed in 1925 and her body was moved here from the Main Square Church.

Festetics Helikon Tavern

The family had huge vineyards on the hillsides around Keszthely. The grapes grown on the southern slopes of the Keszthely Hills were processed in the cellar of Diás. When Mary Hamilton first saw the building, she exclaimed: 'it is a tavern!' This is where the name comes from.

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The Festetics family

As a result of their rank and wealth, the Festetics family, a family of Croatian origin, played a hugely significant role in Hungary from the first half of the 18th century.

Kristóf (1696-1768), founder-of-the-fortune Pál Festetics's successor, was not far behind his father when it came to the acquisition of wealth. In 1739, he acquired the Pethő family's estates in Keszthely, where the construction of the new family residence (*Festetics palace*) began in 1745. He put down the foundation of the *family library* and created the Festetics entail. He greatly contributed to the development of (the town of) Keszthely by establishing a *pharmacy* and a *hospital* with a permanent doctor.

His son, **Pál** (1722-1782) received the rank of count from Maria Theresa in 1772. It was also thanks to him that work started at the *secondary grammar school in Keszthely*. Due to his efforts and influence with the queen, in 1774 the town was granted the *right to organise a weekly market*. He carefully looked after his ships and always made sure they were in good condition. He built the first really large sailing boat of Lake Balaton, the *Christoph* in 1753. Three of his children are considered extremely significant for different reasons:

Julianna (1753-1824) became Ferenc Széchenyi's wife, so she was *István Széchenyi's mother* who is referred to as the "Greatest Hungarian". As a nature lover, she had a *significant collection of minerals* which she donated to the nation and which formed the *basis of the Hungarian Natural History Museum's exhibition*.

György I (1755-1819) was *one of the most outstanding members of the family* with the Georgikon (first collage of farming in Western Europe), the Helikon celebrations (contemporary literary meeting), the library and many other activities.

Imre (1764-1847) kept an accurate pedigree record on his farm. Before J. G. Mendel, he first recognized some important principles of inheritance. He introduced the term *genetics* into academic literature. With his observations of behaviour he was a *forerunner of ethologists*.



Julianna Festetics



György I Festetics



Imre Festetics

In his will, Pál divided the entail into equal parts among his sons. However, György I succeeded in keeping the entail together in his hands. He compensated his brothers with money. György Festetics added a huge amount to the family fortune (at the beginning of the 1800s his annual income was about four times higher than that of the Archbishop of Esztergom). He was also a great patron, spending a lot on public causes.

László, György I's son (1785-1846), was the next in the family line, who was not only a contemporary but also a supporter of his cousin, István Széchenyi. Following in his father's footsteps, he improved the Fenék stud and also had a classical-styled *mansion* built there in the 1820s.

László's elder son, **Taszió I** (1813-1883) was an excellent soldier. It was thanks to him that English thoroughbreds were added to the Fenék stud (thus enriching the stock).

As a representative of the king, Taszió I's brother, **György II** (1815-1883) opened the Economic College in 1865, which was based on the foundation laid by Georgikon, which had been closed in 1848. In 1867, Franz Joseph appointed him as "minister around the king's person" in the Andrássy government. His palace in Pest was built based on Miklós Ybl's designs in 1864. It is located behind the National Museum.

Since Taszió I died unmarried, the estate was entailed on György II, as he had children. Both brothers died in 1883, just a few days apart.

Therefore, George's eldest son, **Taszió II** (1850-1933) became the next in the line of succession. He married Princess Mary Douglas Hamilton in 1880, with whom they lived in a happy marriage until her death.



Taszió II Festetics



Mary Douglas Hamilton



Stud of Fenék

Mary Hamilton was related to several European ruling dynasties, she came from one of Scotland's most prestigious and wealthiest families and her first husband had been the Prince of Monaco. The palace got its current form under Taszió II. The final parts, the tower and the north wing were added in his time, works on the building were completed in 1887. In front of the palace a semi-circular park was created with a fountain in the middle. In 1911, the Count and Lord Chamberlain was given the rank of Duke by the king. After his wife's death (1922), he erected a monument in the local cemetery in her memory. (1925, Festetics Mausoleum).

"Certainly, Duke Taszió Festetics was the greatest aristocrat of the historical Hungary. He alone represented an entire era, Hungary after the Compromise and its aristocracy." (Keszthely Journal, 1933.)

After the death of Taszió II, his son, **György III** (1882-1941) inherited the entail and the dukedom. He worked in diplomatic service as an attaché in Paris and in London. He was director of the Hungarian Horse Association and chaired the Horse Breeding Committee. In 1938, he married Countess Maria Haugwitz. Their only child, **György IV** (1940-) was born in November 1940. However, the duke could only spend less than a year with his child as he died in the early days of August in 1941. The widow and the little boy were very much beloved by the inhabitants of Keszthely; she often attended local events and was a devoted supporter of the cause of the poor.

György IV and her mother left the country in September 1944, first they went to Switzerland, then in 1955 they moved to Vienna. In 1945 the Festetics estates of Keszthely were also divided and nationalised. George IV has two sons, **Taszió III** (1978-) and **György V** (1984-).

Kristóf Festetics

Duke Coat of arms of the Festetics family

Pál Festetics



László Festetics

Taszió I Festetics

György II Festetics



Maria Haugwitz

György III Festetics

György IV Festetics, the little duke

