

Hartera: a blend of location, resources, and circumstances

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To understand the history of the Hartera, it is necessary to know about the unique blend of location, available natural resources and historical circumstances that shaped its history.

Our story begins in the year 1821, when Andrija Ljudevit Adamić, a patrician of Rijeka, set up a small paper mill on the left bank of the Rječina river. This mill produced small quantities of hand-crafted rag paper using sieve boxes. This was because Rijeka was an important export location for high quality rags that were the raw material of choice for the manufacture of paper at the time, due to the inhabitants of the former Austro-Hungarian Military Border using local made footwear with flaxen soles, which made this highly prized raw material readily available in large quantities. Furthermore, the main trade route along the Sava valley turned towards the sea and Rijeka at Zagreb, due to the crossing towards Rijeka being easier and shorter than continuing westwards towards Trieste via Ljubljana.

Unfortunately, the factory set up by Adamich was in fact a little more than a converted grain mill with a single hollander beater connected to a waterwheel, with the paper produced by hand using mesh sieves in wooden frames. The resulting sheet paper was of poor quality, and a disillusioned Adamich sold the factory to a William Moline in 1824.

In 1827, the factory was taken over by Walter Smith and Charles Meynier who recognized the importance of the geographical location of the factory, and immediately set up a new plant at the same location, using a Fourdrinier paper machine capable of continuous production of almost any imaginable type of paper. The machinery was powered by simple waterwheels using water brought in wooden channels from the right bank of the Rječina. The factory will very soon become famous for the quality of the paper produced, with the demand for its products raising to the point that by 1834, a second production line had to be set up.

By 1865, the factory was operating five continuous production lines, and the Rječina was dammed upstream of the factory and channelled to a series of water turbines to provide power, with a steam engine enabling operation with reduced capacity when the Rječina dried out.

With the rail lines to Vienna and Budapest operational in 1873, the factory started selling a reasonable share of its output on the domestic Austro-Hungarian market only after 1878, after being invited by the Hungarian government to provide high quality rag paper for official purposes such as bond paper and rolling paper for various Hungarian tobacco factories.

1873 was also an important year in the history of the factory as at that time the Voith grinding pulp mill was added to the Hollander beaters, enabling the manufacture of cheaper wood-based “pulp” paper. This process was quickly improved with sulfuric acid and calcium bisulfite treatment. From this point, printing and writing paper became easily available at a reasonable price, even though the factory will keep on producing high grade rag paper for cigarette rolling, artistic and official purposes.

1886 marks the shift to chemical pulping, with mechanical pulping being retained only for rag paper. From this point, woodchips and processed cellulose had to be imported from far away at a considerable cost, as it became more efficient to process the wood at the place where it was felled. Luckily, the railways provided an affordable means of transport.

The factory entered the 20th century with a marked shift to electric powered machinery, however a series of natural disasters resulted in the owners being forced to turn the factory into a shareholder society with *Hungarische Papier AG* having a decisive majority. The new, speculative corporate culture resulted in all production lines except the rolling paper lines being dismantled and transferred to Hungarian mills at the eve of the First World War. Just before the breakup of Austro-Hungary, the factory completes the transition to electric power.

After the war, with the formation of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the factory ends in the hands of the First Croatian Savings Bank, which immediately realises the importance of the factory, and invests in replacing the dismantled machines for the production writing, printing, cardboard, and satin paper and expanding the capabilities of the existing rolling paper lines.

The interwar years resulted in further modernization of the production process, while the factory narrowly escapes destruction in the Second World War. The greatest time of technological improvement is in the 1960s and 1970s, when hemp was introduced as the raw material for paper production, and a full circle is completed with raw materials as flax plantations are established to improve quality control. Rag paper production switches completely to flax and hemp fiber by 1970.

The variance in products reaches its highest point in the 1970s when the factory expands into paraffin match production in addition to various grades of writing and printing paper, and special paper types. Yet in all this time the most exported and most important product was the rolling paper in booklet, bobbin, and roll forms.

This paper bears witness to a trade secret discovered by Smith and Meynier. While other mills had to have a water treatment plant to prepare the water, the Hartera had its water provided by nature, coming from three karst wellsprings on the right bank of the Rječina. The spring water was of high purity and of the appropriate hardness for papermaking, and it came with a particular blend of calcium and magnesium carbonate which made it particularly suitable for the manufacture of high-grade rolling paper, in addition to other high-grade rag and cellulose based papers.

Unfortunately, all this was not enough to keep the old lady running. A veteran of two world wars, she finally succumbed to the conflicts of the 1990s resulting from the breakup of Yugoslavia, closing after the loss of market and supply of raw materials. Now its halls stand silent, picked clean by salvage dealers, and patiently await their fate... or perhaps a new life of art and culture?

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