

BRANOBEL HISTORY PROJECT

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Nobel returns to Georgia

A delegation from the Centre for Business History in Stockholm visited Georgia in March 2011 together with the Chairman of the Nobel Family Society. For Professor Thomas Tydén, it was 90 years since his relatives and Branobel left the region, at the time of the Russian Revolution. The delegation travelled along the same railway tracks as those used in the days of the Nobel brothers, from Tbilisi to Batumi. Finds of industrial archaeology from the heyday of Branobel were made along the way. In Batumi, an old Branobel oil storage cistern was found that was still in perfectly usable condition (!), and the Nobel brothers' former residence had been restored and turned into a small but nice technology museum.



Happy encounter across the generations. At the Batumi oil terminal, Thomas Tydén finds a relic, probably from Ludvig Nobel's Machine Building Industry in tsarist Russia. A cast-iron valve lid with an inscription in Russian "ТОБ БР. НОБЕЛЬ" [Nobel Brothers' Company]. Photo: CBHS

New partners and contacts

In Georgia, the CBHS established contacts for the Branobel History Project, with historical archives at national, regional and local levels, which preserves source material about Branobel. With the help of coordination support from the Embassy of Georgia in Stockholm and effective collaboration with authorities in Tbilisi and Batumi, the programme for the visit was efficient and very productive. The delegation was received by top-level representatives of the Ministries of Justice, Culture and Economy. Preliminary agreements for project cooperation were signed on March 24 with the National Archives in Tbilisi and the Nobel Brothers Batumi Technological Museum. Excellent working contacts were also established with the Adjara Autonomous Republic Government Archives Administration in Batumi. The visit was rounded up with a reception hosted by the Swedish Ambassador Diana Janse. Georgian media clips from the CBHS visit to Tbilisi are available at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-d6rIXy-q7Y



Alexander Husebye, CEO and Head of the Swedish delegation from the CBHS, is interviewed by media at the National Archives in Tbilisi. Photo: CBHS

Transcaucasian Oil Route

In the late 1870s, it was costly and cumbersome to reach Western markets by traditional means of paraffin transport. Together with Rothschilds and other investors, Branobel built the Transcaucasian railway and pipeline



The Surami tunnel under construction. The tunnel (completed in 1890) was a tremendous improvement, not only for oil transport between the Caspian and Black Seas but also for Baku oil, opening a volume gateway to Europe. Source: National Archives of Georgia.

from Baku to Batumi and the Black Sea – opening a new and competitive gateway to Europe. A tunnel was blasted through the Surami mountain pass, using 400 tons of Alfred Nobel’s explosives, and other methods.

The century-old old transport route is just as relevant today, and the old tunnel is still in regular use. Branobel and Rothschilds have long left and new actors now operate the overland oil transport infrastructure and the Batumi oil harbour. SOCAR, Statoil and Kazakhstan Oil are among the dominant trademarks today.

New sponsors

The Nobel International Fraternity has decided to sponsor the Branobel History Project with a USD 25,000 grant that will enable a swift start to the preparations to scan some of the Branobel Company’s historical archives in Baku with technical assistance from the Public Union for Azerbaijani-Scandinavian Cooperation. We hope this



Signing the grant agreement in Villa Petrolea: Philip Nobel (centre), founder of Nobel International Fraternity, shaking the hand of Bahram Atabeyli, Director of the Public Union for Azerbaijani-Scandinavian Cooperation, in the company of Togrul Bagirov and Irene, Anna and Nils Oleinikoff. Photo: Baku Nobel Heritage Fund. Image cropped by CBHS.

generous act will stimulate other local sponsors to step forward and join the project.

The launch of branobelhistory.com

The launch date is approaching for the Branobel History Website and Digital Archives. This will take place in three steps.

In June 2011, a first release will take place at the Centre for Business History in Stockholm in conjunction with an annual protocol event arranged by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the heads of diplomatic missions in Sweden. A more research-oriented launch is being planned for the autumn, especially for the Branobel Digital Archives, with interaction from Swedish academia.

In October, an international launch ceremony with a research conference is due to take place at Villa Petrolea in Baku together with various stakeholders. So far (June 2011), however, very little Branobel archive material has become available in digital format from Azerbaijan, pending project finance, but with each new initiative for local sponsoring in Baku, participation in the Branobel Digital Archives is likely to grow.

Coming up next

A one-week visit to Sweden by a top-level delegation from the national and regional Georgian archives is planned for late August 2011 to exchange expertise on current archive operations in Sweden. Discussions will continue, in parallel, on Georgian collaboration in the Branobel History Project. The study visit will be organized and hosted by the CBHS with co-finance from the Swedish Institute (www.si.se/English).

Contact

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CENTRUM FÖR NÄRINGSLIVSHISTORIA
CENTRE FOR BUSINESS HISTORY IN STOCKHOLM

The Centre for Business History in Stockholm (CBHS) is a leading corporative historical archive of its kind. The CBHS preserves and presents the business history of Sweden and is the driving partner of the Branobel History Project.

Collaborating partners:



The National Board of Archives of the Azerbaijan Republic represents 79 archives across Azerbaijan. In one of them, the old company files of Branobel are preserved. A scientific archive cooperation agreement with the CBHS was signed in September 2010 for the Branobel History Project.



The National Archives of Georgia became a partner in the Branobel History Project in March 2011 by signing a preliminary agreement with the CBHS for joint development and planning of a cooperation project on digitization of Branobel material in Georgia.



The Nobel Brothers Batumi Technological Museum is the former residence of the Nobel brothers in Batumi. It was restored in 2007 and now exhibits a small but interesting collection of Branobel-related items, maps, pictures, artefacts and pieces of machinery. A preliminary agreement on cooperation was signed with the CBHS in March 2011.



The Nobel Family Society is a private society comprising descendants of Immanuel Nobel the younger. Its mission includes protecting the name and promoting the history of the Nobel family. In May 2011, the Nobel Family Society signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the CBHS stipulating its commitment to support the Branobel History Project wholeheartedly and to assist it whenever possible.



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