

LOUIS KOSSUTH'S LIFE & 1100 YEARS OF HUNGARIAN HISTORY IN 20 MINUTES

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k-1 My intro is also on k-1. Updated: Mon. 3-16-09, 9 am. written solely to be read orally

In 18-48, "the remarkable" Lajos Kossuth led the revolt for Hungarian independence. Three years later, an American ship brought him our shores as "the nation's guest." Kossuth met the president. He spoke to Congress -- in English.

BUT BEFORE we learn more about Louis Kossuth, let's quickly look back at Hungarian history -- leading up to the events of 18-48.

THE STORY OF THE HUNGARIANS-- IN EUROPE-- BEGAN 1100 YEARS AGO. Back in the year 8-96, Chief Arpad led 7 Hungarian tribes from central Asia, into their new home in central Europe. The new nation of Hungary was founded and flourished.

In the year 1,000, there was much "ceremony" with the coronation of the first Christian king of Hungary. The Pope thought that this was such an important event that he gave the new king, Stephen, a jeweled crown. (That crown can be seen today in Budapest in the Hungarian Parliament Building) Later, the Church made King Stephen a saint --along with several other early Hungarians. By the year 1492 (when Columbus discovered America) Hungary was the equal of England in population and wealth.

But in the 1500s, things took a turn for the worse. For over 100 years, the Muslim Ottoman Turks had been trying to fight their way into Western Europe. Hungary had been blocking their way. Then, in 1526, the Turks decimated the Hungarian army and killed the king. Turkey took control of central Hungary for over 150 years.

Finally -- just before the year 1700-- the Turkish occupation was brought to a close. The Turks were driven out of Hungary by the Austrian Hapsburg emperor.

For the next 150 years, Hungary was swallowed up by Austria and ruled from Vienna.

That brings us to the year 18-48 -- the year Hungarians stood up and tried to

to take back their country. The freedom fight was led by Lajos Kossuth.

Who was Kossuth? For hundreds of years, the Kossuth family had belonged to the Hungarian nobility. (But, that didn't mean they had a lot of land or money.)

Louis was born in 1802 in the small village of Monok in today's Borsod County.

His father was a lawyer and Louis became a lawyer. He was elected by the nobles of his county to represent them in the Hungarian Diet. This was a time for orators.

And, Louis Kossuth was "a voice" to be reckoned with. He rose to prominence in the Diet.

After 1776 and the American Declaration of Independence, the great, new, American "experiment"-- in democracy and federalism-- was the talk of Europe: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights...." These were some of the words of the Declaration of Independence . Europeans considered these words as they lived in countries ruled by dictators, kings, kaisers, emperors, and czars.

And, in the case of Kossuth, he read the popular 18-34 Hungarian book, "Journey to North America." (You can find a translation in the Columbus Public Library.) It was written by a Hungarian -- Alexander Boloni Farkas. He visited America in 18-31. Farkas praised the freedom he found in America. He even wrote about the thrill he had when he shook hands with the seventh president of the United States, Andrew Jackson. The book won a prize from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

It set a record in book sales. But, then Austria banned the book as treasoness, subversive. The Farkas book was just one way that Kossuth learned about conditions in America.

After the March 15th demonstrations in Budapesht-- sparked by the poet Sandor Petofi-- Kossuth led his farmer/peasant army in the 1848 Hungarian revolt against Austria.

At first, his Magyar troops were successful. But then , the Russians intervened.

The Russian czar sent troops to help the Austrian emperor.

Kossuth's army was crushed. Thirteen Hungarian generals were hung for treason.

Nonetheless, Kossuth's charisma--and his vision for a democracy in Hungary-- captured the imagination & favor of people all over Europe and in early America.

In the U.S. Congress, then-Congressman -- and future president -- Abraham Lincoln, introduced a resolution of sympathy for the cause of Hungarian freedom.

An Ohio minister called for Kossuth to be invited to America as "the nation's guest."

A Mississippi senator introduced a resolution to send an American ship overseas and bring Lajos Kossuth to America.

Kossuth reached young America in December of 1851. It was just 62 years after the inauguration of George Washington, as the first president. In New York City, thousands of people welcomed him as a hero. 31 canon shots were fired into the air, one for each of the 31 states in the Union. The 1850 census showed that the young American democracy had a population of just over 23 million.

There was a "Kossuth craze" in early America. The U.S. of over 150 years ago, loved the bearded Hungarian with the velvet suit, a sabre by his side, and the tall Kossuth top hat with a feather in the brim.

In Washington D.C., Kossuth had dinner with the 13th president of the United States, Millard Fillmore, and met with Secretary of State, Daniel Webster. He was the first foreigner (after Lafayette) invited to speak before the U.S. House of Representatives. He spoke in English, which he learned in prison-- studying the Bible and Shakespeare.

Kossuth traveled to 16 states, giving hundreds of speeches, to enthusiastic crowds. The journalist Horace Greeley said of him: Among orators, patriots, statesman, & exiles, he has no superior--living or dead. The poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said: Every day brings a new speech by Kossuth--stirring & eloquent. All New York is ablaze

with his words...wonderful to speak so long & so well in a foreign tongue.

In early February, 18-52, he came to Ohio by train. It was just 49 years after Ohio had officially become a state. He found a rousing reception in Cleveland. On sale were: Kossuth satin badges, Kossuth prints, and Hungarian war bonds. In his many Ohio speeches, he often mentioned that he was born the same year as the state of Ohio. (It was in 1802 that the Ohio constitution was written.)

Kossuth spent 3 days in Cleveland. And, then, accompanied by Ohio Governor Wood, he moved on to Columbus by train. Columbus welcomed him with a torch light parade.

The Ohio census said that Columbus had a population of less than 18,000 people. Kossuth spoke to the Ohio General Assembly in February, 1852. In his speech, he said: "The spirit of our age is Democracy. All for the people, all by the people, nothing about the people without the people." That's what Lajos Kossuth said in Columbus in 18-52. That was 11 years before Lincoln's 18-63 Gettysburg Address. (?Do you think that Abraham Lincoln may have borrowed some words or ideas from the "remarkable" Hungarian patriot: Louis Kossuth?)

You'll find those words--downtown--on a bronze plaque on the first floor of Columbus City Hall at 700 W. Broad St., at Front St. Over 50 years ago, the plaque was paid for (by among others) the parents and grandparents of some of the people who may be sitting next to you in this church today. At the bottom of this 19-52 plaque, it says: "Presented in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Louis Kossuth's visit to the City of Columbus, by southern Ohio's spirited Hungarians...."

The Columbus plaque is just one of the legacies of Kossuth's visit to early America. Another legacy is in Cleveland on Euclid Avenue-- a statue at University Circle. A 2nd statue is in New York City. The newest statue is in Algona - -in front of the county courthouse in Kossuth County, Iowa. Also -- after the fall of Communism-- a Kossuth bust & plaque

were placed in Washington D.C. in the capitol Rotunda, partly through the efforts of Congressman Tom Lantos of San Francisco. Congressman Lantos was born in Budapest. He was the only holocaust survivor in the Congress, serving 28 years, until he died in 2008.

There are many reminders of Kossuth's US visit. Many city streets & rural roads are named for him. Today, there are five Kossuth villages : in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and in Mississippi. The only Kossuth County is in Iowa, south of Minneapolis. In the 1850s, there were even more Kossuth villages, but over the next 150 years, they were absorbed by nearby larger towns. In recent years, I have visited & taken pictures of each of the six remaining locations. Here are 2 souvenirs I picked up in my travels. HOLD UP.

A few months ago, in NW Ohio, I visited a village named for Kossuth on November 9. It's near Lima, just a few miles from the I-75 freeway. I attended the Sunday 10:30 AM service at the historic Kossuth United Methodist Church. On Nov. 9, they celebrated their 100th anniversary & the pews were filled. (The church is about the same size as this church, but still has an active Sunday School program for area children.) After the service, I was invited to enjoy a potluck in the basement social hall. At 1 PM, they had an interesting program featuring a dvd with pictures & music from the church's past. Some previous ministers-- returned & reminisced about "the good old days." Inside the church, was a large portrait of Kossuth, donated by some Hungarian visitors to the village. The next day, I visited the Sandkuhl Tile Company, a factory that has been in the community over 100 years. I talked with Lyle Sandkuhl, one of the owners. He is chief elder of the Kossuth church. I showed Lyle & several staffers 2 scrapbooks with pictures of my visits to the six Kossuth locations in the US. I have the 2 scrapbooks with me--a long & a short version-- so if you are interested, you can look at it later.

IN 18-48, LOUIS KOSSUTH HAD TWO GOALS-- to win independence for Hungary
AND to establish a federal republic, modeled after the USA.

Kossuth's vision was to create--inside historic Hungary--different ethnic regions and
similar to US states-- give the ethnic regions substantial self government.

WHAT IF --over 160 years ago -- he had succeeded in establishing "a United States
of Hungary." WHAT IF he had been able to create the 2nd permanent democracy in the
world AND the very first "federal republic" in Europe. IF he had been successful, THEN
today's Hungary might be one of Europe's larger countries with language regions similar
to Switzerland--which has cantons (or language regions) in German, French, & Italian.
But that did NOT happen. ?Would you like to hear what DID happen?

Would you like to hear "the rest of the story?"

IN JULY OF 1852, Kossuth left America and eventually moved to northern Italy.
He continued to try to raise support to resume the revolution. MEANWHILE, the young
Hapsburg emperor, Franz Jozsef, negotiated with the Hungarians-- the 1867 Great
Compromise --creating the new nation of Austria-Hungary. Hungary once again regained
control of its historic territory--as the junior partner in Austria-Hungary--AFTER over 300
years of being under someone else's domination. Except for Russia-- Austria-Hungary was
Europe's largest country in territory. Only Russia and Germany had more people.
Hungary was independent in domestic policy, but foreign policy was made by Austria.
The Austrian emperor was the Hungarian king.

That worked well for 47 years--until WW I began -- AFTER the heir to the throne of
Austria-Hungary paid a royal visit to Sarejevo, Bosnia. (At the time, Bosnia was part of
Austria.) Serbian terrorists SHOT AND KILLED the heir and his wife. Hungary opposed
punishing Serbia, but WW I began when Austria moved troops into Serbia in July, 1914.
Then, Russia moved to help Serbia. Then, Germany moved to help Austria. Then,

Britain & France moved to help Russia. After 4 years, US intervention ended the war .

The 1920 Treaty of Trianon brought harsh dictated terms to Austria-Hungary. The huge Hapsburg territory--which played a major role in Europe for hundreds of years--was dismembered. Hungary was politically out-manuevered by its ethnic neighbors. Six slices of historic Hungary were lost to 6 different present day countries. Due to a secret treaty with the French, Romania gained Transylvania---an area larger than today's Hungary. The Czechs enticed the Slovaks into a temporary alliance, by promising them independence--within a larger country.

The 1920 Treaty of Trianon left today's Hungary with only 28% of its historic territory and only 36% of its population. One- third of ethnic Hungarians--over 3, 300,000 --- were forced to become 2nd class citizens in new successor countries.

WW I proved to be a disaster-- not for only Hungary, but for the world. The harsh Treaty of Versaille led to high--out of control-- inflation in Germany, to the rise of Hitler, & then to the 2nd world war.

The Russian Revolution and Communism-- came to Russia during WW One. So WW I led to the "cold war," that dominated the rest of the 20th century.

In 1990-- after the fall of communism-- Hungary had free & democratic elections. In 2004, Hungary became a member of the European Union. (The only slice of historic Hungary to join the EU -- that same year -- was an independent Slovakia.)

In 2007-- with enthusiastic Hungarian support-- Romania became a member of the EU.

In 2009, there are still 3 slices of historic Greater Hungary--that still are not enjoying the benefits of the European Union. Those 3 slices now belong to Ukraine, Serbia, & Croatia.

**LAJOS KOSSUTH REFUSED TO GO BACK TO HUNGARY, UNLESS
IT WAS FREE OF THE EMPEROR. HE DIED IN 1894-- AT AGE 91.
HIS BODY WAS RETURNED TO HUNGARY -- AFTER HIS DEATH.**

In modern Hungary, some history books remember him as: "controversial ."

The decisions he made in 1848 and after are argued and re-argued. He is honored in a great many Hungarian cities & towns--with streets, squares or statues. His face is on Hungarian money. A few miles north of Miskolc, you will find the Kossuth Museum in Monok, the small village in Borsod County, where he was born. In Hungary, the March 15th national holiday remembers the 18-48 freedom fight.

In modern America , the name of "the remarkable" Louis Kossuth has been left out of most history books. In 2009, there remain five Kossuth villages and one Kossuth county. And, there are still a few places, like the first floor of the City Hall in Columbus, Ohio where his name & bearded image are honored.

OVER 150 YEARS AGO, WHEN LOUIS KOSSUTH LEFT AMERICA,
the New York Times wrote about him: "A score of years hence, there will be nothing of which an individual will more eagerly boast, than he has seen, heard, and perhaps grasped the hand of the great statesman of Hungary; the hero of the 19th century...."

Arthur Allan Bartfay Columbus, Ohio--March 15, 2009,

keynote speaker for a memorial program, remembering Louis Kossuth & the 1848 freedom fight. Hungarian Reformed Church, 365 Woodrow, corner Washington, Columbus 43207. This presentation was written to be read. Words are spelled & punctuation is done solely with that in mind.

Artur's Hungarian parents came to America before WW I from small villages near the Tisza & Sajo Rivers. A graduate of Michigan State University in East Lansing (BA, MA), he also studied at The Ohio State U & retired from the staff after 25 years. He is a member of the American Hungarian Educators Association & the Columbus Hungarian Cultural Association. For several years he coordinated the Summer Hungarian Research Workshop Week at the U of Illinois. In 2005, he taught conversational English to teens in Transylvania & visited cousins in 7 Hungarian towns.