

Asbóth

VASVÁRY, E: Lincol'n's Hungarian Heroes  
1939

**ASBOTH ALEXANDER (1811—1868)**

Born December 18, 1811, at Keszthely, county of Zala, from a family of English descent, whose nobility with the surname, de Nemeskér, was granted in 1715. One of his ancestors was the court chaplain of Prince Emery Thököly, the step-father of Prince Francis Rákóczi II. His grandfather was John Gottfried Asboth, a Lutheran pastor in Sopron, and his father was a professor at the Lyceum of Késmárk and the director of the Georgikon at Keszthely. He later became the director of the Crown estates in the county of Bács and was considered one of the country's most famous agricultural experts.

One of the Asboth brothers, Louis, became a general in the war of independence in 1848. Alexander Asboth, who was eight years younger than his brother, graduated from the academy at Selmecbánya, and became an engineer. He received a government appointment, and was sent first to Temesvár, then later to the Bánság. At the outbreak of the war in 1848, he received a commission, serving with the engineers, but he also took part in many battles, as the battles of Kápolna Szenttamás and Nagysarló. When the council of war at Temesvár refused obedience to Kossuth, Alexander Asboth did not identify himself with them, but remained loyal to the leader of the nation, and went to Debreczen with General Klapka. It was here that Kossuth came to know the faithful soldier. He was made an adjutant to Kossuth, to act as a referee on military affairs.

Louis Hentaller writes: "Kossuth was exceedingly fond of Asbóth since he was a well-educated man of unblemished character, who highly deserved the friendship of his beloved chief."

He was with Kossuth during the last days of the war of independence, and when two days before the surrender at Világos, Kossuth left the fortress of Arad on the carriage of General Damjanics, to begin his exile, Asboth was the only person to accompany him on this sad, long journey. They went to Turkish territory and spent the months at Sumla, and Vidin and later those at Kutahia, Asia Minor, together, until the time came for their liberation by the generous offer of the United States.

When the emigrants and their leader embarked on the "Mississippi", September 10th, 1851, Asboth was one of them, and only separated from Kossuth at Gibraltar, who leaving the warship at this point, went to England for a short time. Asboth arrived in New York with the other passengers on the "Mississippi" on November 10th, 1851. Upon reaching America he immediately declared his intention of becoming a citizen, because he felt that the United States was to become his permanent home.

Kossuth arrived in New York on the 5th of December, and for a short time they were together, but soon their paths separated. Asboth could not accompany the Governor on his tremendous tour, but remained in contact with him, and helped to wind up the matter of buying arms and munitions. At first he worked as an architect, later was employed by a firm named Baldwin at Syracuse, N. Y., then he went West as a mining engineer. Going back to New York he opened a small steel

foundry, which was moderately successful until his partner disappeared. Then he was employed in New York as an engineer of the city planning commission. In this capacity he had a prominent role in planning Washington Heights and the famous Central Park.

He enlisted immediately after the outbreak of the Civil War. When he was not successful in organizing a regiment upon receiving an appointment from Governor Morgan of New York to do so, he went to Missouri, which, thereafter, became his home. Already in July of 1861 he was chief of staff of General John C. Frémont, who on September 26th of the same year appointed him a Brigadier-General, but this appointment was approved by congress only in March, 1862. He served as Brigadier General on the staffs of Generals Frémont, Hunter and Curtis. He distinguished himself in several battles in the states of Missouri and Arkansas, particularly at the capture of Bentonville, and Fayetteville, but it was at the battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas that he so distinguished himself in action that Congress approved his appointment as Brigadier-General. He was wounded in this battle, but in spite of his injuries the next day he was in the saddle again leading his troops.

When the campaign in Missouri was ended, he was ordered to Kentucky, with Columbus, Ky. as his headquarters, then he was entrusted with the command of the West Florida Department, with headquarters at Fort Pickens. He was severely wounded at the battle of Marianna, Florida. His left arm was shattered in two places by bullets. Another bullet entered the right side of his face, and it was never possible to remove it. This injury was very painful, and troubled him during his entire life, and hastened his early death. He resigned from active service on March 13, 1865, when he was appointed Major General by Brevet for his meritorious services.

After the Civil War, to reward him for his valuable services President Grant, the former Commander-in-Chief appointed Asboth U. S. Minister to Argentine and Paraguay. He was in Washington when he received the appointment in March, 1866, signed by Secretary of State Seward. He was anxious to leave as soon as possible to his station, but since he suffered a great deal from the bullet in his face, he went to Paris on the steamship "Fulton," on June 6th, 1866, so that he might be operated upon by one of the most famous surgeons on the continent, Professor Nelaton, who performed a similar operation on Garibaldi. He remained in Paris until the end of August, during which time the operation was attempted more than once by Professors Nelaton, and Fouvel, and two assistants. The operations aroused such interest that Bigelow, the United States ambassador in Paris and his secretary, Pomeroy were always present at them. But it was not possible to remove the bullet, and Asboth carried it with him to his grave. The operations succeeded only in giving him relief for a short time.

From Paris Asboth went to London, and embarked for Rio de Janeiro on the "Oneida." From there he went to Montevideo, and was taken to the capital of Argentina, Buenos Aires by the American man-of-war "Shamokin," arriving there on Oct. 14th, 1866.

The capital gave the general a hearty reception. He suffered from the long trip, and his wound became troublesome again, so that his last months were filled with suffering. In less than six months he took to his bed, and for months and weeks, as he wrote in his letters, he felt that his strength was slowly ebbing away. In spite of this, he attended punctiliously to the duties of his office, and rendered excellent service in the diplomatic negotiations in the war with Paraguay. The gravely ill General always hoped that he would be able to travel to Hungary to

take the mineral baths there, but his hope did not come to pass. He died on January 21st, 1868 when he was only 57 years of age. He was buried in the old English cemetery at Buenos Aires and he is still resting there.

The President of the Argentine Republic, Sarmiento delivered a eulogy at the funeral.

Asboth was a tall, spare man, a splendid soldier, an excellent commander, who coupled military discipline with humane treatment. He was deeply religious, and during the exile in Turkey it was in his room that services were held by the Rev. Gideon Acs, the Hungarian Calvinist clergyman, also a passenger on the "Mississippi," who became the first Hungarian pastor in America. When Asboth had to flee, he left his fiancée in Hungary, who died while he was with Kossuth in America. He never married.

(In Bibliography see: Numbers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 25, 29, 34, 35, 38, 46, 48, 51, 53, 63, 64, 81, 82, 87, 91, 99, 100, 106, 119, 120, 122, 129, 132, 133, 148, 160, 161, 162, 181, 200, 205, 219, 225; Appendix 9. 10.)