

Society of the Washingtoni

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By ANDOR KLAY

General Alexander Asboth,
American Minister to Ar-
gentina, 1866-68.

General Julius Stahel-Szavald,
American Consul
General, 1865-69, 1877-85.



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The JOURNAL suggested in a recent editorial that "there be created a Society of the Washingtoni," an association of direct descendants of FSO's posted abroad "during the critical, formative period in the rise of our Free Nation . . . December, 1776 . . . through the Civil War." Observing that the Society "would have an illustrious company of ancestors," the writer of the editorial asked, "Who are these ancestors, other than Franklin, whom we would revere?" In reply, he cited a series of illustrious Anglo-Saxon names such as Adams, Jefferson, Hawthorne, Payne, Monroe, Livingston and others.

No approach toward the more obscure but equally important segments of the history of our Foreign Service can be well balanced without remembering that the rosters of FSO's, just like those of our soldiers or sportsmen, have always abounded in less polished and even downright unpronounceable names borne by likewise genuine Americans. Let us recall Whitman's pronouncement about our "teeming Nation of Nations"—and let us speak, for instance, of FSO's György Pomutz, Gyula Stahel-Számvald and Sándor Asbóth, with a view to the question whether their descendants could qualify for membership in the proposed Society.

A common denominator of the three men with the weird names can be derived from their role in the Hungarian "War for Liberty" of 1848-49, an elemental uprising under the leadership of Louis Kossuth against the House of Hapsburg with the objective of establishing a democracy patterned after the American system. As it happens, it was exactly one hundred years ago that Kossuth visited the United States amid an acclamation unsurpassed even by that which had been accorded Lafayette, and was the second foreign guest of the United States Government [Lafayette was the first] to be invited by the Congress to address the legislators.¹

Each of the three men under reference was an officer in Kossuth's army until its collapse under overwhelming Austrian and Russian onslaughts; each fled to the West when the end came; each found new life and liberty in America. None of the three could speak a word of English upon arrival; within ten years all three rose to high rank in the American army and eventually attained prominence in the Foreign Service of the United States.

The thumbnail sketches which follow cannot, of course, mirror the extraordinary personal character of these ordinary immigrants, and only thorough presentation could adequately depict the colorful romanticism of their personalities.

¹A. Klay & W. Kamrad: *The Visitor Speaks: American Freedom Viewed from Afar, 1800-1950*. (Washington, 1950; Williams & Heintz Co.)

But even a handful of pebbles picked up from the long, hard road of their peregrinations can hardly fail to impress. Here they are:

1. POMUTZ, George—Captain in the Army of the Hungarian Republic, 1848-49. Arrived in the US, 1850. Organized a regiment in the Union Army; rank of Major, 1861, at the age of 33. Lieut. Col., Aug., 1864; Colonel, Nov., 1864. Hero of battles of Shiloh, Vicksburg, Atlanta, etc.; repeatedly wounded. United States Consul to St. Petersburg, Russia, 1866-78.

2. STAHEL-SZAMVALD, Julius.—Captain in the Army of the Hungarian Republic, 1848-49; awarded the Medal of Exceptional Merit. Arrival in the US, 1859. Organized a regiment in the Union Army; rank of Brigadier General, 1861, at the age of 36. Hero of the first battle of Bull Run and battles of Cross Keys and Piedmont, Va.; repeatedly wounded. Major General, 1863. Consul General in Japan [Yokohama, Osaga, Hiogo] and in China [Shanghai], 1865-69 and 1877-85. Awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor [for heroism in battle of Piedmont, Va., 1864] in 1893.

3. ASBOTH, Alexander.—Captain in the Army of the Hungarian Republic, 1848-49. Arrived in the US, 1851. Volunteer adviser, then chief of staff, to Gen. John C. Fremont, with rank of Brigadier General, 1861, at the age of 50. Hero of the battle of Pea Ridge, Ark.; wounded. [A bullet in his right cheek remained through the rest of his life.] Ended service as Major General. United States Minister to Argentina, 1866-68; died in office.

Immigrants all, Americans all, these men personify the generative power of the American spirit. They knew well that just as terror assures its own survival only by increasing its field of irresponsibility, so liberty insures its survival only by increasing its field of responsibility. They came to love that American idea which enables men to advance creatively without fear; they came to understand that American ideal which opposes the reduction of society to a uniform pattern.

In a specific sense directly applicable to the times in which we live, these men taught us a lesson first learned by them from their erstwhile chief, Kossuth. Speaking in English learned in prison, he said at a meeting of the Masons of Massachusetts one hundred years ago:

"From Russia, no sun will ever rise. There is sky and water there; but to find the sunlight where it most spreads and lightens the path of freedom, we must come to America. All who now suffer from oppression in the East, look with hope to the free institutions of this Western world, for it should be remembered that although this country, the United States, is west of Europe, it is east of Asia; and from this east, light may again dawn on that benighted region."