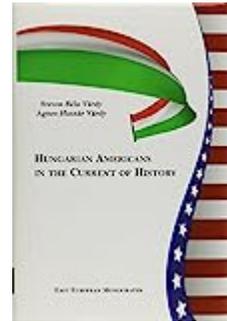
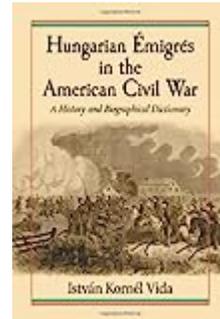


Steven Béla Várdy, Agnes Huszár Várdy. *Hungarian Americans in the Current of History.* Boulder: Columbia University Press, 2010. 302 pp. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88033-668-0.



István Kornél Vida. *Hungarian Émigrés in the American Civil War: A History and Biographical Dictionary.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2012. xi + 256 pp. \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-6562-0.



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Hungarians in America: Contrasting Studies

The two books under review examine Hungarian experiences in America within the framework of generational waves of migration. While both highlight Hungarian contributions to American history, they are primarily concerned with the experiences of the Hungarians themselves in America. However, the books differ greatly in approach and methodology. *Hungarian Émigrés in the American Civil War* by István Kornél Vida examines a single generation of migrants, the “Kossuth generation,”

and the experiences of Hungarians who participated in the American Civil War. *Hungarian Émigrés in the Current of History* by Steven Béla Várdy and Agnes Huszár Várdy covers a period from Lajos Kossuth’s leadership to the early twenty-first century.

The subject of *Hungarian Émigrés in the American Civil War* is tightly focused; as Vida notes, the 2,710 Hungarians in America in 1860 were dwarfed by latter waves of migration, and he positively identifies only 99 Hun-

garians who served on either side during the Civil War. The narrow focus allows Vida to engage in comprehensive research. He examined sources located in archives in Austria, Hungary, and the United States; census data; emigration statistics; and a rich collection of surviving memoirs. Vida writes in part to correct past accounts of Hungarian Americans that he characterizes as motivated by a desire to legitimize the Hungarian place in America; he argues that these accounts engaged in myth building.

Section 1 provides a detailed analysis of the experiences of the Kossuth generation of émigrés in America, especially those who participated in the Civil War. The real strength of the study is its quantitative research. Vida scours census and migration data for evidence of the experiences of the Hungarian minority, a process aided by the migrants' small numbers. He uses statistical data to contextualize his qualitative sources, distinguishing between typical and extraordinary experiences. Chapter 1 examines the scale of the Kossuth generation and its motives for migration. It begins with Hungarian perspectives of America before 1848 as a land of freedom, before entering into statistical analysis of the migrants themselves. Vida contextualizes the initial arrival in the brief period of pro-Hungarian mania during Kossuth's visit there. He effectively brings out the migrants' conflicting aspirations and regrets, most strikingly through a poem by Eugene Kozlay.

Chapter 2 analyzes the experiences of the migrants in America. On the one hand, many migrants desired to return swiftly to Hungary. Ladislaus Áhzy led ultimately unsuccessful efforts to keep the émigrés in close proximity in a nationalist settlement, New Buda, ready to return to the fray when the time came. Émigrés returned to Europe to enlist in the Crimean War and in the Hungarian Legion in Italy, during the 1859 campaign by France and Piedmont against Austria. On the other hand, most émigrés were confronted with the more difficult challenge of supporting themselves over an extended period in a new country where their skills as Hungarian gentlemen were in short demand. Vida uses employment and property data from the 1860 census, coupled with the émigrés' personal accounts, to highlight that most of the Kossuth generation struggled to make a new start. He sees the need to make a living as driving migration westward, scattering the émigrés and undermining political connections between them.

Chapter 3 examines the motivations of émigrés in enlisting in the Civil War. Vida dismisses claims that

Hungarians in the Union army were primarily motivated by the antislavery struggle, arguing that most of the eighty-seven Hungarians in the Union army fought for other motives: to preserve from dissolution the American ideal of democracy, benefit financially, validate their skills and prior military experience, engage in adventure, rise in status, and show their commitment to the local communities in which they settled. Vida provides some context by comparing the Kossuth generation to the German émigrés, with whom they often served. He also examines the twelve Hungarians who joined the Confederate army. Here records are scantier and Vida relies on analogy and inference in order to tease out likely motives, such as to profit financially and demonstrate loyalty to the state. He argues that Hungarians, like most Confederates, were unlikely to be fighting to preserve slavery per se.

Chapter 4 charts the careers of Hungarians in the Union and Confederate armies. Vida uses enlistment rates to dismiss claims that Hungarians were particularly enthusiastic supporters of the Union in the war. Hungarians, Vida argues, enlisted at much the same rate as other immigrant communities. He then traces units in which individuals and groups of Hungarians served, dismissing claims of Hungarian units in the Union army; while individuals and small groups sometimes had significant influence, there were simply not enough Hungarians to constitute whole regiments. He notes, for example, that the Thirty-Ninth New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment previously identified as "Hungarian" actually consisted of a range of different émigrés, in which Hungarians were outnumbered by Italians, Germans, and others. Comparisons to other émigrés help contextualize the Kossuth generation.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the military careers of a few select individuals. Chapter 5 examines three prominent Hungarians in the Union army: Alexander Asboth, Julius Stahel, and Charles Zagonyi. Vida reviews the hagiography of these individuals in previous Hungarian accounts, arguing that while all three were of significance, previous literature distorts their individual importance. Chapter 6 focuses on the story of the con artist Béla Estván, who also holds a prominent position in accounts of Hungarian participation in the war. Vida argues that Estván was not in fact Hungarian; his claim to Hungarianness was motivated by a desire to take advantage of the pro-Kossuth sentiment. While the observations made in chapters 5 and 6 are timely corrections to the existing literature, Vida does not take full advantage of these chapters. While detailed personal accounts provide an oppor-

tunity to reinforce his analysis in the previous chapters, these chapters seem to stand slightly alone. Furthermore, if Estvn was not a Hungarian, one wonders why he warrants an entire chapter of his own in this volume, especially as much of the chapter concerns his postwar career.

Chapter 7 returns to overall Hungarian experiences in the Civil War, examining Hungarian attitudes to slavery. Vida finds very few Hungarians who owned slaves. He argues that while most Kossuth migrs opposed slavery, they nonetheless adopted the attitudes prevalent in American society, assuming African Americans to be inherently inferior to whites. Vida examines the ten Hungarian officers in Coloured Units and concludes that a motive of promoting equality can be positively demonstrated only in the case of a few individuals, such as Ladislaus Zulavsky and Ignatz Kappner. Other officers, he suggests, may have been motivated by better opportunities for advancement and pay.

Chapter 8 looks at the postwar experiences of Hungarian veterans. On the whole, veterans benefited from their war experiences by becoming progressively better integrated and financially better off. He finds this to be equally true for the small number of Hungarians in the Confederate army.

Section 2 consists of biographies of each of the Hungarian veterans of the Civil War. The biographies are inevitably uneven due to the variability in available source material; many grapple with conflicting sources and obscuring legends. Vida meticulously cross-checks the claims of migrs against government records, highlighting many incidents where migrants embellished their military records or otherwise made claims unsupported by further evidence. Sources are clearly cited, enabling researchers to follow up Vidas work. Many of the individual stories are extremely compelling. This section, as Vida intends, will be of particular use to genealogists and those interested in the history of individual Civil War units.

Several points stand out that would have benefited from further discussion. Vida lists all the soldiers whose Hungarian origin can be substantiated (p. 133). Yet the precise definition of being Hungarian is not clear. Vida does not mean of Hungarian citizenship, as he notes, there was no such thing (p. 157). Nor is it clear that birthplace or ancestry determine Hungarianness. Vida excludes Estvn because he was born in Vienna.... And most importantly he was Austrian by birth (pp. 101-102). However, he includes Nicolai Dunka, born in Mol-

davia of Romanian ancestry and referred to by his companions as the crazy Vlach (meaning Romanian) (p. 141). Hungarian nationalism was far less concerned in the period with ancestry than with the willingness of individuals to embrace Hungarian national values and culture. But the exclusion of Estvn suggests that a declaration of Hungarianness was not enough. These cases, and the ability of Hungarians to enter into the German community in America, imply that Hungarianness was complex and ill-defined; the fractured nature of ethnic identity in central Europe in the mid-nineteenth century would suggest that it was possible to be many things at once. Furthermore, the experiences of Hungarian veterans highlight the possibilities for self-invention. Vida painstakingly records the complex claims of his subjects, but tends to view, for example, embellishment of individual roles in the Hungarian Civil War through the eyes of a biographer determined to tell the truth, rather than considering the act of self-invention as a subject worthy of historical investigation in its own right.

Secondly, Vida most frequently compares the Kossuth migrs to the German 48ers. Many Kossuthers spoke German, and some held positions in the German migr community. Few Hungarian women immigrated to America in the 1850s; many veterans married German wives. Vida informs us that Hungarians and Germans enlisted for similar reasons, and often served together, along with other refugees of the 1848 revolutions. Should the Kossuthers be understood specifically as Hungarians, or as a subsection of 48ers? Vida highlights one factor distinguishing Kossuthers from German 48ers: the relative lack of Hungarian migr institutions. Perhaps other distinctions could have been made.

Overall, Vida has produced an extremely valuable addition to the scholarship on the Kossuth generation, their post-49 careers, Hungarian migration to the United States, and migration more generally, as well as a significant contribution to the history of the American Civil War. The biographical section of *Hungarian migrs in the American Civil War* will be of considerable use to war historians and genealogists.

While Vidas focus allows him to research intensively, including providing a great deal of qualitative analysis, the approach of Vrdy and Vrdys *Hungarian migrs in the Current of History*, by necessity, is far more extensive than intensive, and is at times impressionistic. However, the broad scope of the book allows a consideration of cross-generational themes. The chapters

in this volume—most sole authored by Steven Várdy, but two (6 and 12) coauthored with Agnes Várdy—were originally published as journal articles over a ten-year period; two (chapters 5 and 12) appear in English for the first time. The linking theme of this volume might be more accurately described as “Hungarians in America” rather than “American-Hungarians”; neither Kossuth nor Otto von Habsburg can reasonably be described as “American.” The collection is also only very lightly edited. The editors have removed some repetitive material, but otherwise reproduce the articles in their original form.

Unfortunately, a great deal of repetition remains. Standalone articles published in different journals on related topics will at times, by necessity, cover similar themes and material. However, placed side by side, the repetition becomes irritating, especially in the first few chapters of this volume. Nor is it clear why each chapter requires a separate (and often overlapping) bibliography. Even so, many of the individual essays are of very high quality. Furthermore, the scope of the volume allows the authors to draw out key themes that occur across generations, such as the process of reinvention by which immigrants made themselves a place in America, and the difficulty of shaping American opinion.

Chapter 1 sketches the history of Hungarians in the United States. Steven Várdy highlights well the different circumstances, motivations, and trajectory of settlement pursued by different generations of arrivals. Successive waves are well anchored within the context of broader Hungarian history, and are briefly contextualized within the broader history of migration to America. In their introduction, the editors regret the lack of interest in Hungarian studies in America. Perhaps to compensate, chapter 1 includes a list of successful entrepreneurs of Hungarian ancestry; while this demonstrates the successful integration of Hungarians in American business circles as Steven Várdy claims, the decision to list the value in US dollars of their corporate fortunes seems excessive.

Chapters 2-5 focus on Kossuth’s American trip. The reader is assured that Kossuth “left a virtually indelible mark upon American politics and upon the fabric of American society” (p. 31). Indelible perhaps, but on the evidence presented, it is a very faint mark. Kossuth was ultimately unable to sway American foreign policy. His visit awakened an intense interest in Hungary and all things Hungarian among the American public, but this was short lived. Apart from a handful of monuments and a plaque, Kossuth’s main mark appears to be that he is the best remembered, most often quoted of Hungarians

in America, as noted by Vardy.

Nonetheless, Várdy makes some fascinating observations about Kossuth the man, and about his reception in America (as opposed to his influence on America). Chapter 2, “Louis Kossuth and the Slavery Question in America,” captures nicely the hysteria around his visit, including the adoption of Hungarian clothing and fashions, and some opportunistic rebranding of their products by entrepreneurs. However, Kossuth became entangled in the dispute between slave owners and abolitionists, who sought to use him to further their own aims. The abolitionist North presented Kossuth as a beacon of struggle against tyranny, and called on him to publicly condemn slavery. While Kossuth was disposed to condemn slavery, he was unwilling to alienate the South where his nationalist cause was popular. However, in failing to condemn slavery Kossuth alienated the North, without gaining any substantial support from the South. His trip ended in ignominy and a skulking retreat. Closely related, chapter 4 examines Kossuth’s fund-raising visit to Pittsburgh in 1852. Várdy highlights the level of public enthusiasm over his visit, as well as the way in which organizing committees took advantage of Kossuth’s visit to benefit themselves, squandering the funds he collected. This chapter provides a very interesting example of how local notables high-jacked Kossuth’s cause for their own purposes. Kossuth’s experiences underline how American politicians, social reformers, and businesses could exploit a popular foreign cause. They highlight the mercurial nature of public opinion, where strong interest in Kossuth gained him access to leading politicians but resulted in little political mileage. There is some irony that Otto Habsburg was to have similar experiences, as discussed by Várdy in chapter 9.

Chapters 3 and 5 are less substantial. Chapter 3 examines a similar turn of phrase in Kossuth’s address to the Ohio Legislature and Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Noting the popularity of Kossuth’s speech, Várdy argues that Kossuth had an influence on the Gettysburg Address. This is an interesting but highly speculative argument; there is no “smoking gun” demonstrating a direct connection. Chapter 5 refutes claims by a popular Hungarian TV documentary about alleged American descendants of Kossuth. This chapter may have played a corrective role when originally published in Hungary, where the documentary was shown, but it seems to offer little to academic audiences.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine the large-scale Hungar-

ian migration to America between the late nineteenth century and the First World War. Chapter 6, coauthored with Agnes Várdy, analyzes Hungarian migrant workers' poems about working conditions in Pennsylvania in the early twentieth century, particularly regarding several devastating accidents in 1907-1908. The poems evoke early twentieth-century working conditions and capture poignantly the desire of migrants to conceal their circumstances from their loved ones at home. These poems will be of particular interest to labor historians researching migrant experiences. The authors conclude that the industrial workers were the victims of "the Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled by the Habsburgs," which failed "to offer them a decent life supported by decent wages," forcing them to emigrate (p. 99). The supporting evidence for this conclusion comes from an article in a socialist émigré paper, *Népakarat*; this interpretation is not explicitly expressed in the poems on display here. One wonders whether the workers themselves had the same understanding of their plight.

Chapter 7, "Hungarian and Slovak Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America," examines the struggle between Hungarians and Slovaks in America over their shared history. The author identifies a fierce battle between Hungarian and Slovakian émigré periodicals over Hungarian "oppression" of the Slovak nation. The author sees Slovaks as responsible for propagating the "Hunky" negative stereotype of Hungarians as crude, violent and uncivilized. He suggests that Slovak chauvinistic nationalism developed as a response to a sense of inferiority of Slovak peasant migrants to industrial cities of America, who attempted to assert their moral superiority over Hungarians as means of restoring their dignity more broadly. Despite the title, the chapter focuses predominantly on Slovaks. The author does an admirable job of puncturing myths of Slovak nationalism, but does not place Hungarian national myths under the same spotlight. However, within this limitation, the chapter provides a valuable analysis of the utilization and reworking of national myths from the homeland in a new context.

Chapters 8 and 9 examine the efforts of Hungarians in America to defend the interests of Hungary during the Second World War. Chapter 8 explores factionalism of Hungarian émigré organizations and their divided efforts to lobby the American government on Hungary's behalf during the Second World War. The author focuses on efforts of opponents to Hungary's alliance with Germany, particularly émigré politician Tibor Eckhardt, to broker a peace deal between America and Hungary.

Chapter 9 highlights the efforts of the heir to the Habsburg throne, Archduke Otto von Habsburg, supported by Eckhardt, to lobby the American government for a postwar Habsburg restoration, as well as half-hearted attempts by the Hungarian government to use the archduke as a bridge to peace with the United States. The popular archduke appeared to have some influence on the American administration; restoration seemed possible until 1943. These cases highlight the fluidity of borders during the war, and the contingency of the eventual peace settlement. However, they also highlight the limited flexibility within which American foreign policy could operate, within realities dictated by the outcome of the war and the determination of the Soviet Union to prevent a Habsburg restoration. These chapters present parallels to Kossuth's experiences in America, highlighting the difficulties that émigrés faced in influencing American foreign policy.

Chapters 10-12 explore a series of interconnected relationships: American perceptions of American Hungarians, the American Hungarian self-perception, and the American Hungarian relationship with Hungary. They draw together issues of dual identity that occur in many chapters of the book. Chapter 10 examines changing American and self-perceptions of Hungarians in America, highlighting the strategies that successive migrants have adopted in order to find a place in American society, and the struggles they have faced in doing so. For example, the "48ers" were welcomed as liberals and widely credited with a noble background, which most of them lacked, but which many assumed. The Displaced Persons generation, seen as fascist sympathizers, found the path to integration harder to follow. The "56ers" received a more sympathetic welcome; many reinvented themselves as "freedom fighters" and skilled workers, claiming technical training that many exaggerated. Várdy also highlights tensions between different generations of migrants, particularly bourgeois "45ers" and "47ers" on the one hand, and on the other hand "56ers," who were beneficiaries of the socialist education system. He draws on differences in social background, mannerisms, and sexual mores to explain these tensions.

Chapter 11 examines the relationship of Hungarian Americans to Hungary. Várdy highlights the differing attitudes of successive generations of migrants, as well as the responsiveness of Hungarian Americans to changes in Hungary. He charts opposition to Habsburg rule before the First World War, outrage over the Treaty of Trianon, divisions between a socialist minority and the majority who preferred Miklos Horthy to Bela Kun,

the overturning of Trianon on the eve of the Second World War, hostility to the Communist regime, and support for post-Communist Hungary. This essay, written in 2000, ends with a positive assessment of the relationship between American Hungarians and the Hungary under Viktor Orbán after his electoral victory in 1998.

Chapter 12, coauthored by Steven and Agnes Várdy, examines American Hungarian loyalties under the American model of so-called civic nationalism. The authors posit American-style âdual loyaltiesâ as a solution to the âpopulist-urbanistâ debate in Hungary over whether ethnic origin determines Hungarianness. The chapter, which takes the form of an opinion piece, is not footnoted.

The essays in *Hungarian Americans in the Current of History* are uneven, and the light editing will be frustrating for those wishing to consult multiple chapters. However, many of the individual chapters are of a very high standard. Collectively, the book is revealing of generational issues, such as the process of reinvention as part of acclimatizing to America, and the difficulty of influencing American public opinion. As a whole, the book will be of considerable interest to those interested in migration history and Hungarian migration specifically. The two books complement each other; Vidaâs emphasis on quantitative analysis and meticulous fact checking makes a nice counterpoint to the appreciation in *Hungarian Americans in the Current of History* of reinvention as a survival strategy in itself worthy of study.

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