

Hungarian City and County Names in the United States

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THE UNITED STATES is called the melting pot of different nationalities, a country where everybody is either an immigrant or a descendant of an immigrant. Even the Indians were immigrants, with the difference that they preceded the white man by about 10,000 years. We may say, however, that this is a country where respect for traditions of the old country is not just tolerated but encouraged. Consequently the different immigrant groups compete with one another, each to prove that its own nationality contributed more than did the others to our American heritage. The Hungarians are no exception. They not only claim that there was a Hungarian in Leif Ericson's party, but amateur ethnologists insist that the ancestors of the American Indians and of the Hungarians were neighbors or even close relatives in Asia before they began their journeys in two different directions.

Hungary as a small country was forced to fight for her freedom against successive armies of foreign invaders from both the east and the west for almost a thousand years. Just as Col. Kovats¹ had to leave his country, many soldiers of all ranks had to leave as well – even several generals – some of whom fought on both sides in the American Civil War.

Also very important for the United States were the accomplishments of August Haraszty, who planted the first vineyards in California with stocks imported from Hungary, and whose life-sized statue was erected in front of his original 1,000 ft.-long wine cellar. On the anniversary of his death one hundred years ago, the United States Department of Agriculture honored Haraszty with a memorial display in May 1969.² He gave us California wine and to the English language a meaningful word, *Tokay*. Tokay is originally a city in the center of the world-famous wine growing region in N.E. Hungary and the word refers also to the wine which comes from the grapes of the region. In turn the name *Tokay* was given to a post office carrier-station in Lodi, California. The Superintendent of Mails answered my inquiry by writing that "The name *Tokay* was used because of the Flame Tokay grape that grows so well in the Lodi area."

¹ Founder of Washington's cavalry.

² *Katolikus Magyarok Vasarnapja* (Catholic Hungarians Sunday) July 13, 1969, p. 3.

There were other less famous Hungarians as well after whom American towns were named, like *Vidor* in the southeast corner of Texas. It came into existence as a logging community in 1913 when the Miller and Vidor Lumber Company purchased the assets of the Beaumont Sawmill Company and built a railway system known as the Peach Line. Vidor was incorporated in 1960 with a population of 1,100. *Vidor* is a not uncommon and relatively recent family name as well as given name in Hungary. The word was coined by language reformers in the middle of the nineteenth century and meant "gay" or "joyful." In everyday language it is very rarely used today.

Agar in South Dakota was named after Charles H. Agar, one of the early Sully County pioneers at the end of the nineteenth century. He came to the Dakota Territory from New York State with a party of men on an expedition sponsored by the C & N.W. Railroad. The railroad picked the site for the town because of the rich farmland, and Mr. Agar purchased the land where it is located. In 1910 he sold his holdings in the form of town lots. Today *Agar* has a population of about 150. The Hungarian word, *Agar* means "greyhound," and is sometimes used as a family name.

"Imlay in Nevada is a Southern Pacific Railroad town (pop. 200) east of the upper end of the Rye Patch Reservoir. The town was surveyed for the railroad circa 1907 by a civil engineer named 'Imlay' for whom the town was named."² *Imlay* or *Imolay* could be a Hungarian family name after the town *Imola*.

Buda in Hungary lies on the right bank of the Danube, *Pest* on the opposite side. The two cities were united at the end of the nineteenth century to *Budapest*, the capital of Hungary. *Buda* was the name of Attila's older brother who resided where *Buda* of *Budapest* lies today.

In Texas there is a *Buda* too (pop. 500). It was settled in 1881. "The people were greatly inconvenienced by the lack of a depot, and they began to talk of getting one. One day when a railroad official was there, Col. W. W. Haupt of Mountain City walked up to the official and said: '[We] do pray, give us a depot.' The town got both a depot and a name 'Du Pre' (Do Pray). However, the name was changed to 'Buda' in 1889 because the railway company had another Du Pre station in Texas."³ Although it is not so known to the majority of the town's inhabitants, I am sure that another Hungarian railway official deserves the credit for this.

Besides *Buda*, Illinois and *Buda*, Texas, I found only one town named after a Hungarian geographical name: *Tolna*, North Dakota (pop. 320).

² Rufus Wood Leigh, *Nevada Place Names, Their Origin and Significance*. Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1964, pp. 26-27.

³ *San Marcos Record*. Golden Anniversary 1912-1962. Sept. 20, 1962.

Tolna is an administrative district in Hungary. These districts used to be as independent and proud of their heritages as the states of the United States. Older Hungarian immigrants introduce themselves to other Hungarians even today by giving their name and their district in the old country. This local patriotism seems to have been transferred even to the present postmaster of Tolna, North Dakota, who noted in his reply: "Tolna, one and only city so named in the U.S. Postal Directory."

Unquestionably the most popular Hungarian in the United States has been Louis Kossuth. Not only was Buda, Illinois "named in honor of Kossuth's town in Hungary,"⁴ but two towns and a county in the United States were named after him. A young nation, which successfully won a lasting freedom, paid respect to a champion of liberty, to a son of an old nation which has been fighting for her freedom during her thousand years old history, with little or no success. Kossuth had a great respect for the United States. During his three years as a political prisoner in Austria between 1837 and 1840, he taught himself English, and there is a little anecdote about this. Since he learned the language from books alone, his pronunciation was not very good. After he was released, he had an opportunity to talk with an American diplomat – in English. The diplomat listened intently, and said after a while: "Mr. Kossuth, I did not know that in the Hungarian language there are some English words, too."

Kossuth was born in 1802, and became the leader of the Hungarian revolution in 1848. After its defeat he lived in exile from 1849 until his death in 1894. He visited the United States in 1851–52. His English must have improved considerably since he was one of the few foreigners who were invited to address the Congress in Washington. He visited several states as well. He visited Mississippi and was so popular that a town, when it was incorporated in 1870, received the name *Kossuth* (pop. 600). He visited Pennsylvania too. In this state a community is also named *Kossuth* (pop. 71). This town was much larger during the time of the big oil boom than it is today.

The people in these two towns know who Kossuth was, but nothing has been written about the naming of their towns. However, a book was published about Kossuth County in Iowa.⁵ The book narrates elaborately the history of the Hungarian revolution, and Kossuth's leading role in it, as well as describing Kossuth's trip to the United States and to Iowa. It also describes how the people and leaders of the county decided to name their county after Kossuth.

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⁴ *Taxpayers Guide* — 1877, Buda, Ill.

⁵ *Kossuth County, Iowa. History of Kossuth, Hancock and Winnebago Counties, Iowa.* Springfield, Ill.: Union Publ. Co., 1884, p. 933.