

A Letter to the President from New Buda, Iowa

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The years 1848 and 1849 brought revolution to many parts of Europe, and Hungary was no exception. In April, 1849, Louis Kossuth became head of a revolutionary government which declared Hungary's complete independence from the Austrian Empire ruled by the Hapsburgs. However, the Austrians, aided by the Russians, defeated the Hungarian army, and Kossuth and many of his compatriots were forced to flee their homeland.

As happened after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, many of the refugees of the fight for independence in 1849 came to the United States. One of the leaders of the refugees who arrived in this country in December, 1849, was Ladislav Ujhazy. Designated by Kossuth as his representative in the United States, Ujhazy tried to keep interest in Kossuth and Hungary alive in America. Shortly after his arrival, Ujhazy petitioned President Zachary Taylor to help Kossuth, who was being held in a Turkish prison, to gain his freedom and then come to America.¹

Like many other new Americans, Ujhazy decided on a home in the West. His destination was the Grand River Valley and what was to become Decatur County in southern Iowa. The land which he and some fellow immigrants selected is in the southern part of Decatur County, just north of the Missouri border and not far from the present-day towns of Lamoni and Davis City. The settlement was named New Buda, a name still carried by a township in Decatur County.²

¹ John H. Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America, 1851-1852*, State University of New York College at Buffalo's Program in East European and Slavic Studies, no. 4 (Buffalo, New York: East European Institute, 1973), pp. 35, 37, 42.

² David C. Mott placed the townsite in section 14, New Buda Township. See David C. Mott, *Abandoned Towns, Villages and Post Offices of Iowa* (Council Bluffs: J. W. Hoffman and S. L. Purington, 1973), p. 36. Guy Reed Ramsey locates the New Buda Post Office as "About 2½ miles South of Davis City (Sec. 14, New Buda Twp. 67N, R26W). Established December 31, 1850, Ladislav

After his arrival, Ujhazy is reported to have picked out some land and built a large log cabin. Later the settlement was the site of a post office and Ujhazy became the postmaster.³ When Millard Fillmore succeeded to the presidency in 1850 after Zachary Taylor's death, Ujhazy wrote him the following letter:

New Buda, September 8, 1850

Mr. President,

From the midst of a great and calm solitude, which the variable fortune of human affairs has, for the present, designated for my home, I have taken the pen in order to offer to you my congratulations. Your patriotism and your endowments had assigned to you the second station in this happy country; the will of the Supreme Being, which decides upon the destinies of man, has elevated you to the first. Nay, to the first on the Earth; for to be a Chief-Magistrate of a glorious and really free people, is the highest and most honorable post which a mortal can occupy. You will use its power, I am certain, for the advancement of liberty in general, as well as of happiness of all the human race. May God preserve your health for these purposes is my sincere prayer.

After a very toilsome voyage, I have at last established myself with some of my countrymen in the State of Iowa, Decatur County, on the banks of the River Crooked-forks, which the few settlers of this place call "Thompson's river," upon the public land free for private entry, which our hands fortified with a strong will commenced to cultivate. This our will has always been invigorated by a sweet hope, that the magnanimity of Congress will grant us a small portion of those lands, with which Kind Providence, endowed so richly this happy people!

In the name of those who sacrificed with me their fortunes for the liberty of their country, and for that of all nations, I solicit your distinguished aid in advancing the passage of the bill on our behalf, which is already before Congress.

To honor the memory of my native land, which nothing can

Ujhazy, discontinued April 13, 1880." In *Postmarked Iowa, A List of Discontinued and Renamed Post Offices* (Crete, Nebraska: J-B Publishing Company, 1976), p. 125.

³ Ujhazy was appointed postmaster by Nathan Kelsey Hall, U.S. Postmaster-General of the United States from 1850-1852. "Among Judge Hall's papers in the possession of the Buffalo Historical Society is an interesting letter, in English, from ex-Governor Ujhazy, expressing his gratitude for the appointment." See Frank H. Severance, ed., *Millard Fillmore Papers*, vol. 2, Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society, Vols. X and XI (Buffalo, New York: Buffalo Historical Society, 1907), pp. 317-318.

efface from my mind, and that we may always remember the events which history will take up, I have named the place of our settlement *New Buda*. May it please the Eternal Justice that the same spirit of liberty may be soon established on the soil of the *Old Buda*—which now colonists of the *New* enjoy.

A few days since, I received with great pleasure the first answer to my letters from my friend, Louis Kossuth, dated “Brussa” and some instructions, which I will consider as my duty to lay before you as soon as the circumstances will allow it.

Please accept Mr. President, the assurance of the profoundest esteem which the present circumstances permit me only to express through this devoted to you lines; but which I ardently desire to renew personally.

I have the honor to be

Your most obedient servant

Ladislas Ujhazy⁴

In a reply, Fillmore wrote that he was pleased to learn that the Hungarian had found “a resting place . . . in the new but fertile State of Iowa.” The President thanked Ujhazy for his congratulations, stated “that Congress will deal generously with the Hungarians” and was “gratified to hear that you receive communications from the noble and gallant Kossuth.”⁵

About 1853 Ujhazy moved with his family to the vicinity of San Antonio, Texas. His wife had died in New Buda, and pioneer life in Iowa may have been too difficult. However, a few of the Hungarian settlers did remain in Decatur County.⁶ In 1861 President Abraham

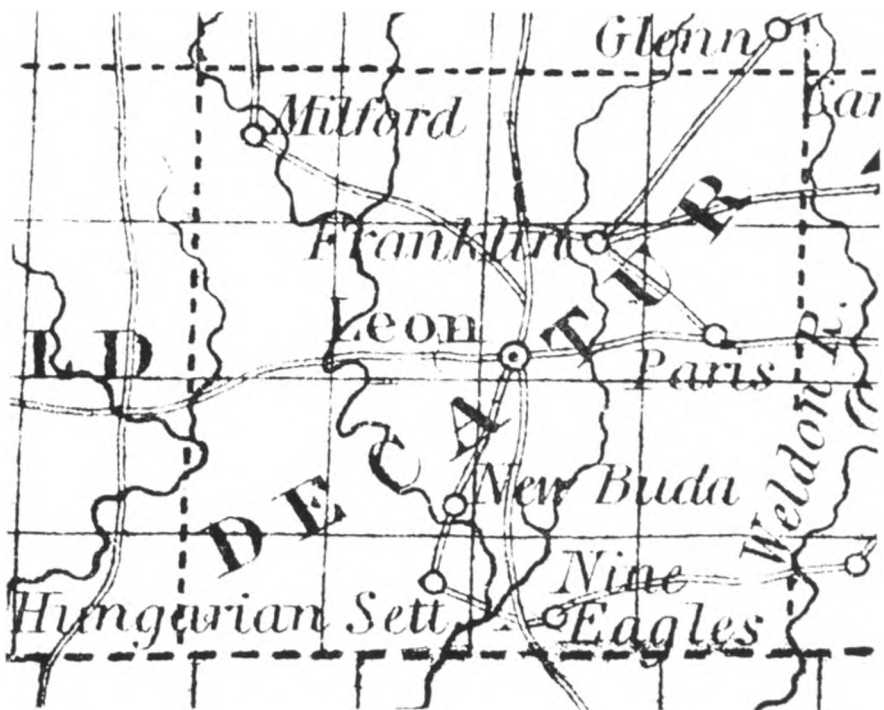
⁴ Ladislas Ujhazy to Millard Fillmore, September 8, 1850, in the Manuscript Letters Collection of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. At the head of the letter is the note: “translated from the French,” and according to Severance, *Millard Fillmore Papers*, Vol. 2, p. 317, the original letter to the President was in French. The autograph letter in English owned by the University Libraries is then a copy which may have been signed by Ujhazy. The letter may also be found in both Hungarian and French in Tivadar Acs, *New-Buda* (Budapest, 1941), pp. 120-123. This is a privately published history of the New Buda community in the Hungarian language. While it is not a scholarly work, it does reproduce 99 letters relating to Ujhazy and New Buda.

⁵ Severance, *Millard Fillmore Papers*, Vol. 2, pp. 316-318. Perhaps the real point of the letter was that Ujhazy and other Hungarian refugees hoped to obtain land from the government on more favorable terms than was usually the case.

⁶ Perhaps the best piece that has been written on New Buda is Lilian May Wilson, “Some Hungarian Patriots in Iowa,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 11 (October 1913), pp. 479-516. My own guess is that much of what has been written about Ujhazy contains some historical inaccuracy. See also: Guy P. Arnold, *New Buda and the Hungarians* (Leon, Iowa: Journal Job Print, n.d.); a copy of this scarce booklet is in the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City; G. P.

Lincoln appointed Ujhazy to the post of United States Consul to Ancona, Italy, a seaport city on the Adriatic coast. He held this position until 1864. Afterwards he is believed to have lived in Texas until his death.

Arnold, "About New Buda and the Hungarians," in *History of Decatur County, Iowa, and its People*, ed. by J. M. Howell and H. C. Smith (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915), Vol. 1, pp. 48-53; *Biographical and Historical Record of Ringgold and Decatur Counties, Iowa* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1887), p. 712; and Himena V. Hoffman, *The History of Decatur County, Iowa* (Leon, Iowa: Decatur County Historical Society, 1972), p. 15.



Detail from *A New Map of the State of Iowa*, published in Philadelphia by Charles Desilver, showing Decatur County, Iowa, in 1856. Note the location of "New Buda" and "Hungarian Sett."