

Unlike coins made of valuable metals, the value of paper money solely relied on the printed denomination. Therefore, the transition to paper money highlights trust in the circulation of money. Studying paper money thus became a way to examine social networks of trust. The United States in the Pre-Civil War Era offered a good example because an exclusive national currency did not exist. Americans could print their own money, which circulated freely within communities of people willing to accept it.<sup>1</sup> By the 1850s, more than 9,000 kinds of paper money circulated in the US.<sup>2</sup> Tracing one of them sheds light on the social networks of trust in which it circulated and the collective identity it shaped.

In response to centralizing policies imposed by the Habsburg Monarchy, Hungarian nationalists staged a national uprising in Pest on March 15, 1848. An agreement was reached on forming a government consisting of Hungarian nationalists, among whom Lajos Kossuth became the Minister of Finance. However, the Habsburg Army suppressed the uprising and restored firm control in 1849. Kossuth was forced into exile as the “governor-president of Hungary,” accompanied by several hundred followers.<sup>3</sup> An invitation from the U.S. government led his way to America, where he planned to secure financial, diplomatic, and even military aid for a second Hungarian revolution, by touring and giving speeches.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael O'Malley, “Money and the Everyday: Paper Money, Community, and Nationalism in the Antebellum US,” in *A Cultural History of Money: In the Age of Empire*, ed. Federico Neiburg and Nigel Dodd (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 73, 75–76.

<sup>2</sup> O'Malley, “Money and the Everyday,” 75.

<sup>3</sup> István Deák, *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 338.

<sup>4</sup> Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 339–343.

Kossuth began with emotional appeals for funds in his speeches, leading to the start of a “Kossuth craze.” By the end of 1851, donations had accumulated to 11,593.92 dollars.<sup>5</sup> More importantly, in December, a Central Hungarian Committee was established voluntarily by several Americans. The Committee issued the “Hungarian Bond Certificates” in denominations of one, five, ten, fifty, and one hundred dollars, promised repayment when (not “if”) Kossuth returned to the governorship of an independent Hungary. Letters were sent to locally prominent families, asking them to advertise the bond and assuring that their names would be honored in the future Republic of Hungary.<sup>6</sup> Another advertising strategy was asking Kossuth to sign all fifty- and one-hundred-dollar bond certificates by himself.<sup>7</sup> People purchased bond certificates from their municipalities, who then handed the money to Kossuth.<sup>8</sup>

American opinions on Kossuth’s fundraising campaign diverged – while abolitionist Quakers celebrated his liberal, nationalist cause, others either disagreed with him in politics or considered his plans doomed to fail.<sup>9</sup> People who purchased the bond certificates, therefore, were either sympathetic to Kossuth’s nationalist cause, or firmly believed that he would succeed in establishing an independent Hungary. Otherwise, no one would have trusted the bond because no assets could ensure its repayment at that moment. As Kossuth himself framed it, ownership of the bond certificates was a political commitment of “all those who sympathize with the oppressed, and hope for the day when liberty shall triumph and Hungary be free.”<sup>10</sup> In many

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<sup>5</sup> Donald S. Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America: A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy, 1848-1852* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977), 57.

<sup>6</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, 58–59.

<sup>7</sup> Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America*, 58–59.

<sup>8</sup> Kossuth, Lajos. *Kossuth in New England: A Full Account of the Hungarian Governor’s Visit to Massachusetts, with His Speeches, and the Addresses that were Made to Him, Carefully Revised and Corrected. with an Appendix* (Boston, MA: J.P. Jewett & Co., 1852), 41, 283–284.

<sup>9</sup> Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 342–343.

<sup>10</sup> Kossuth, *Kossuth in New England*, 35.

municipalities, the imagined community of Kossuth's supporters were even materialized – only people who had purchased the bond certificates were allowed to listen to his speeches.<sup>11</sup>

However, Kossuth felt disillusioned, because as an invited guest, he assumed that municipalities should have covered all expenses. In fact, most of the money he collected was spent on the fundraising campaigns, leaving little to his nationalist activism.<sup>12</sup> The Kossuth craze in America also cooled down very soon.<sup>13</sup> Then Kossuth returned to Europe, finding other Hungarian nationalists negotiating with the Habsburg Monarchy for a win-win compromise. In 1867, a so-called “dual monarchy” was established, in which the Kingdom of Hungary was kept under Habsburg rule but with large autonomy. Consequently, these “Hungarian Bond Certificates” were never repaid.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the 600 spectacular fundraising ceremonies Kossuth gave, together with the Hungarian Bonds, constructed and strengthened a collective political identity in the 1850s American life.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kossuth, *Kossuth in New England*, 82.

<sup>12</sup> Steven B. Várdy, “Louis Kossuth: A Celebrated, Disillusioned Hungarian Revolutionary’s Visit to Pittsburgh in 1852,” *Western Pennsylvania History* 91, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 28–9.

<sup>13</sup> Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 345.

<sup>14</sup> Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 339.

<sup>15</sup> Deák, *The Lawful Revolution*, 344.

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