

Hungarian Jews in the American Civil War

Europeans Jews in the revolutions of 1848 and in the Civil War of 1861-1865

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My presentation will tell the story of the forgotten Jewish freedom fighters of 1848 who became Heroes of the American Civil War. These Jewish immigrants mainly from Hungary (and others from Germany, Austria, and Italy) fought overwhelmingly in the Union army during the Civil War. Not only on the battlefield but they also contributed to human values and took their part in the building of today's America.

This is an untold part of the Jewish history that emphasis on the Jewish contribution to the Union's victory and highlights the role of the Jews in the fight against slavery. Not many know that Jewish 48'ers were one of the reasons of the North's victory and names such as Joseph Pulitzer, Frederick Knefler and August Bondi who fought alongside John Brown in Kansas will appear in Cleveland this summer. It's important to unveil heroic moments of our history that can make a change, at a time when Antisemitism is on the rise and when Jews are accused of being the cause of slavery.

The topic's historical background goes back to the European Revolutions of 1848. When the revolutions (the most influential one was probably the Hungarian, followed by the War of Independence) were crushed the Jews, who participated had no other choice but to flee. I will also mention how the Reform Jewish movement and the revolutions were linked together. In Cleveland we will learn the causes of the revolutions and why the Jews took active parts in them, proving they deserve to be called the descendants of the once great Maccabean rebels.

Most people are unaware of the contribution of the 1848'ers who fought in the American Civil War. Not only they were nearly all veterans of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 but many also fought in the Italian War of Independence. About 1,000 Jewish veterans of the rebellion immigrated to America and volunteered for the Union Army where they brought their much-needed military experience at a time when most of the skilled officers and veterans were in the

service of the Confederates. These Jewish soldiers knew what to expect from this war and more importantly had the experience to form a professional army.

What makes the civil war service of the Jewish 48'ers so special? Some examples we will hear more about can be found as below:

- The Hungarian and other Jewish 48'ers as highly skilled officers were the **backbone** of many newly formed American regiments which had key importance throughout the war. Examples will be detailed.
- The Jews fought as **volunteers** and not as conscripted soldiers in the Revolutionary armies in 1848 and in 1859 many years before the emancipation. Not being equal citizens did not deter them to sacrifice for liberty and humanity.
- It has been a common **prejudice from anti-Semites** that Jews never took up the arms and they did not contribute to their countries. While some people heard of Jewish scientists and doctors the image of the Jewish soldier has not been told yet. The Jews who immigrated to the United States all gave their blood for their new homeland fighting on the frontline. It's time to portray them as faithful immigrants and military heroes from a new perspective. It's also important to mention they never gave up their Jewish faith, and they have not chosen the assimilation.
- All of the **Jews from Hungary joined the Union without exception** (and most from other European countries also served the Union, with a few exceptions) to fight for freedom and equal rights. At least 1000 skilled soldiers came to America's help when the country was the most divided in her history. Other immigrants from Europe (such as the Irish) fought on both sides.
- Jewish officers organized numerous **brigades** during the war. For example Colonel Frederick George Utassy, one of our main characters was the founder and the commander of the famous 39th New York Volunteer Infantry regiment. The regiment was also known as Garibaldi Guard as many of its soldiers fought in the Second Italian War of Independence as well. Frederick Utassy was a „stylish” and controversial figure of the civil war that makes the topic even more exciting!
- **During the war, Jewish officers witnessed first-hand the prejudice directed at African-American soldiers.** No strangers to such bigotry, they provided training to them

when white officers refused to do so. One of those officers was Ignatius Kappner, whose name was later inscribed on several African-American Civil War monuments. Kappner is also known for having trained the 3rd Regiment US. Colored Heavy Artillery into one of the highest skilled units. Sources mention he cared deeply for his black soldiers and even for their families too.

- **One of the highest ranking Jewish generals** of the Union Army was also from Hungary called Frederick Knefler who was barely 15 years old when he already saw the crossfire during the Hungarian Revolution. He was also one of the founders of the first Jewish Congregation in Indianapolis (which is a **Reform** Congregation). Many don't know that **Joseph Pulitzer** the „father” of modern journalism was also a volunteer soldier from Hungary. Though he was too young to serve in 1848, the ideas of the Revolution highly influenced him. We can only learn from their stories and sacrifice.
- **August Bondi**, have people ever heard of this name? He was friends with John Brown the famous abolitionist. Bondi rode through with him in Kansas and later joined the Union cavalry and fought through the Civil War, despite being severely wounded.

Many sources I collected are from Hungary and Europe which haven't been published in English. Only a few heard of Bela Bernstein who was a professor, historian, and rabbi in Hungary. He's known for collecting manuscripts of the revolutions (though he mostly focused on the Hungarian one), he wrote the history of the Jews and 1848 for the first time in the 19th century. He gathered his information from first hands as veterans of the age were still living. Professor Bernstein followed up the fate of the Jewish volunteers who fought in the Civil War. Other local sources come from the Hungarian Military History Institute and Museum while others come from my own research. Additionally I got in touch with descendants of 48'ers and obtained unseen civil war photos of our heroes for use in this purely education work. During the research we also found new discoveries that will have an impact on the Jewish-American history. As a descendant of a Jewish second-lieutenant who fought in the Revolutionary army and as a direct descendant of Holocaust survivors I intend to preserve and promote the Jewish heritage from which we can only learn. My relatives were Second-Lieutenant Samuel Rosenbluth from Arad and Sergeant Mor Pollak from Mako.

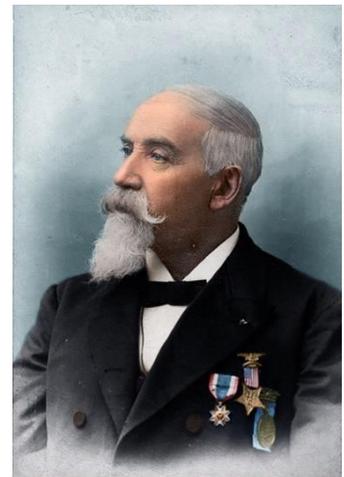
I find it important to have our heroes' photographs restored and colourized to the highest standard so we can see them as they looked like in the time of the Civil War. The below photo on the left is an example that was colourized and restored by our photographer expert.

We can see Frederick George Utassy who was the commander of the famous 39th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment which was also known as the Garibaldi Guards.

If we observe this picture we can identify Hungarian Jewish and American Unionist vibes on the Colonel's dress uniform. It appears he was a very proud man.



I can also present you an unseen photo of Frederick Knefler who was one of the highest ranking Jewish generals. The photo was donated to our project by his direct descendant and was restored and colourized by our expert.



We have also started to produce a fantastic documentary on our heroes as we believe the topic is timely and has key importance in our society. We feel responsible for remembering our heroes.

I look forward to sharing the new discoveries and stories with you in Cleveland.

Peter Rosenbluth Kovacs