

A Hungarian Map-Maker in the Mexican-American Boundary Survey

ANDREA KÖKÉNY
UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

Abstract

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the U.S-Mexican War of 1846–1848 on February 2, 1848. The two countries agreed to send representatives to survey and mark a new international boundary from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico and create maps of it. The fieldwork lasted from the summer of 1849 to the fall of 1853. Just as the surveyors completed their work, however, a new treaty made parts of their survey irrelevant. The region of present-day southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico was purchased by the United States for 10 million dollars in a treaty signed by James Gadsden, the American ambassador to Mexico at the time, on the 30th of December, 1853. The Gadsden Treaty had again called for the United States and Mexico to appoint surveyors, who carried out the fieldwork from November, 1854 to September, 1855. In the first half of my paper I propose to discuss the activity of the Boundary Commissions and their project of surveying and mapping the nearly two-thousand-mile border. The administrative center for the American Boundary Commission was in Washington D. C. It was directed by the topographical engineers who superintended the production of the boundary maps and the work of civilian clerks, who worked on computations, compilations, and drew all the finished maps. One of the map-makers was Károly László, a Hungarian engineer and surveyor, who drew five maps for the American and several others for the Mexican boundary commission. The second part of the paper will focus on his contribution and the characteristics of his identity.

Keywords: Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Gadsden Treaty, U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–1848, Mexican-American Boundary Survey, Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence, 1848–1849, Corps of Topographical Engineers, Károly László, citizenship, identity

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed on February 2, 1848 and concluded the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–1848.¹ The new boundary dramatically altered the political geography of North America and resulted in a major shift in the power relations of the American

¹ “Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,” in ISRAEL, Fred L. (ed.), with an Introd. Essay by Toynbee, Arnold J. (1967), *Major Peace Treaties of Modern History, 1648–1967*, Vol. II, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 733–751; “A Guadalupe Hidalgó-i Szerződés, Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848. február,” in KÖKÉNY, Andrea (trans. and ed.) (2001), *Békeszerződés az Amerikai Egyesült Államok és a Mexikói Köztársaság között*, Documenta Historica 52, Szeged, JATE Press, 9–25.

continent.² The Republic of Mexico was forced to cede the northern half of the country – a territory of 529,189 square miles – to the United States. Thus the boundary was moved to the southern edges of today’s California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. It was an expanse of nearly two thousand miles.³ Some of the land in the borderland region was settled by Mexican ranchers and farmers, but much of the territory was unexplored and to Americans, it was an unknown land.

In the Peace Treaty the two countries agreed to send representatives to survey and mark a new international boundary from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. Article V of the Treaty specified that

“In order to designate the boundary line with due precision, upon authoritative maps, and to establish upon the ground land-marks which shall show the limits of both republics, as described in the present article, the two Governments shall each appoint a commissioner and a surveyor, who, before the expiration of one year from the date of the exchange of ratifications of this treaty shall meet at the port of San Diego, and proceed to run and mark the said boundary in its whole course to the mouth of the Rio Bravo del Norte.”⁴

The ratified copies of the Treaty were exchanged at Querétaro on May 30, 1848, and the fieldwork lasted from the summer of 1849 to the fall of 1853.⁵ Based on primary sources my paper will examine the activity of the Boundary Commissions and their project of surveying and mapping the new border. The administrative center for the American Boundary Commission and the scene of the production of boundary maps was in Washington D. C. One of the map-makers was Károly László, a Hungarian engineer and surveyor, who drew five maps for the American and several others for the Mexican boundary commission. The second part of the paper will discuss his activity and the characteristics of his identity.

When examining the work of the American boundary commission, we can say that their responsibility and power was extensive, as the Treaty pointed out that “the result agreed

² On the content and consequences of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo see, for example: PERRIGO, Lynn I. (1971), *The American Southwest. Its People and Cultures*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 134; CALVERT, Robert A. – DE LEÓN, Arnoldo (1996), *The History of Texas*, 2nd ed. Arlington Heights, Ill., Harlan Davidson, Inc., 103; CONNOR, Seymour V. (1971), *Texas. A History*, Arlington Heights, Ill., AHM Publishing Corporation, 155; CHÁVEZ, Alicia Hernández (2000), *México. Breve historia contemporánea*, México, FCE, 214; VÁZQUEZ, Josefina – MEYER, Lorenzo (1991), *México frente a Estados Unidos (Un ensayo histórico, 1776-1993)*, México, FCE, 61; SALVAT, Juan – ROSAS, José Luis (1986), *Historia de México*, Salvat Editores de México, Tomo 11, 1986, 1806; KÖKÉNY, Békeszerződés, 3–7.

³ ISRAEL, *Major Peace Treaties*, 736–737.

⁴ *Ibid.* 737.

⁵ GOETZMANN, William H. (1991), *Army Exploration in the American West, 1803–1863*, Austin, Texas, Texas State Historical Association, 153–208; MEINIG, Donald W. (1993), *The Shaping of America. A Geographical Perspective on Five Hundred Years of History. Vol. 2, Continental America, 1800–1867*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 151–152; PLETCHER, David M. (1975), *The Diplomacy of Annexation. Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War*, Columbia, Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 567; WERNE, Joseph Richard (2007), *The Imaginary Line. A History of the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey, 1848–1857*, Fort Worth, Texas, Texas Christian University Press, 15.

upon by them shall be deemed a part of the treaty, and shall have the same force as if it were inserted therein.”⁶ Thus, the members of the boundary commission had to be individuals who possessed not only a thorough knowledge of topographic and surveyor skills, but also diplomatic abilities.

Logic suggested that in the United States the work should be done by the nation’s best-trained and most experienced surveyors, West Point-trained members of the U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers. Domestic politics and regional interests, however, resulted in the fact that politicians or people with political affiliations were appointed to lead them. 1848 was an election year, and in its last few months in office, the Democratic administration of President James K. Polk filled the position of commissioner and surveyor with people affiliated with the Democratic Party. This eleventh-hour appointment in December 1848 by a lame-duck president infuriated Whigs, who after the election gained majority and controlled the House of Representatives. The new president, Zachary Taylor, was also a Whig, and was eager to dispense patronage to the boundary commission and appoint his own men.⁷

Today Mexicans and Americans crowd up against the border. But back in the middle of the 19th century, beyond a few small Mexican settlements (for example, San Diego, El Paso del Norte, and Matamoros), the border region was mainly the domain of independent Indian tribes who had no reason to recognize lines drawn through their territory by distant diplomats. Even though in the end the threat from Native Americans never put the boundary commission in real danger, distance from settlements and supplies, summer heat, and difficult terrain made the surveyors’ work quite difficult.

Surveying on such a large scale had to take the curvature of the Earth into account and that required geodesic surveying, which depended heavily on astronomy. Plane surveying, used to measure and mark small portions of the Earth’s surface, was not sufficient. In addition, long stretches of the new border followed two rivers, the Gila and the Rio Grande. Along those rivers the surveyors had to find the deepest channels, as required by the Peace Treaty.⁸ Between the Pacific Ocean and the Gila River and between the Gila and the Rio Grande, their task was even harder. No rivers or other geographical features marked the new border. In the absence of landmarks, the surveyors had to mark a line on the ground and erect or place physical markers. They only put up a few, as they supposed that neither Mexicans nor Americans would ever settle in the arid border region in significant numbers.⁹

However difficult the American surveyors found conditions in the field, the greatest impediment to their work came from Washington D.C. In addition, conflict between political

⁶ ISRAEL, *Major Peace Treaties*, 737.

⁷ GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 153–154; REBERT, Paula (2011), “A Civilian Surveyor on the United States-Mexico Boundary: The Case of Arthur Schott,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 155, No. 4, 435; WEBER, David J. and ELDER, Jane Lenz (eds.) (2010), *FIASCO: George Clinton Gardner’s Correspondence from the U.S.-Mexico Boundary Survey, 1849-1854*, Dallas, Texas, Southern Methodist University Press, William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, DeGolyer Library, xix.

⁸ ISRAEL, *Major Peace Treaties*, 736.

⁹ EMORY, William H., Major First Cavalry and United States Commissioner (1858), *Report on the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey Made Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior*, Vol. I, Washington, 5; WEBER and ELDER, *FIASCO*, xix.

appointees and topographical engineers began almost immediately, and it plagued the survey to the end.¹⁰

The job of boundary commissioner for the United States was assigned to John B. Weller. He was a lawyer and politician by profession and had previously been a three-term Democratic congressman from Ohio and an unsuccessful candidate for governor of that state. As he was a political appointee of James K. Polk, the new president, Zachary Taylor recalled him in June 1849 and replaced him with John Charles Frémont. The famous explorer, however, declined the commissioner's post and instead ran for the senatorial seat of California – and won. All this caused considerable delay in the work of the surveying party, especially because the new boundary commissioner was only appointed on May 4, 1850. John Russell Bartlett had no surveying, nor diplomatic skills. He was a prominent bibliophile and amateur ethnologist from Providence, Rhode Island, who at the time of his appointment ran a bookstore and publishing house in New York City, which specialized in foreign books and travel accounts. He organized a party of topographical engineers, civilian surveyors, mechanics and field scientists and left New York at the beginning of August, 1850. However, it took him several months to reach El Paso.¹¹

James K. Polk gave the post of surveyor to 29-year-old Andrew Belcher Gray. He was an experienced surveyor who worked for the Republic of Texas on the United States-Texas Sabine River Survey in 1840. However, his civilian status and rudimentary knowledge of astronomy put him at odds with the survey's West-Point-trained topographical engineers.¹²

Appointed as "Chief Astronomer and Commander of the Escort" for the survey party was Major William Hemsley Emory. His qualifications for inclusion on the delegation were exceptional. He had graduated from West Point in 1831 and entered the Corps of Topographical Engineers in 1838 when it was formed under the War Department. By 1849 his considerable experience included two years of surveying the Canadian-U.S. boundary. Moreover, he was the only American scientist to have travelled across the Southwest, from Santa Fe to Los Angeles. When the United States declared war on Mexico in 1846, Emory had been assigned to accompany General Stephen Watts Kearny on an almost two-thousand-mile trek to New Mexico and California – through much of the territory scheduled for survey by the boundary commission. Along the way Emory had mapped the route, and he produced a scientific report upon his return.¹³

Emory's assistants were Lieutenant Edmund L. F. Hardcastle, who had conducted a reconnaissance of the valley of Mexico, and Amiel Weeks Whipple, a young lieutenant from Massachusetts. He was a West Point-graduate and for the previous five years he had been working on the Northeastern Boundary Survey dividing Canada and the United States. Altogether, the total complement of the commission consisted of thirty-nine men directly involved with survey operations, an army escort of a hundred and fifty soldiers, and a varie-

¹⁰ GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 167–195; WERNE, *The Imaginary Line*, 19.

¹¹ EMORY, *Report*, 1; GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 163–173; WEBER and ELDER, *FIASCO*, xxii.

¹² BAILEY, L. R. (ed.) (1963), *The A. B. Gray Report*, Los Angeles, Westernlore Press, xi-xiii; GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 158; REBERT, "A Civilian Surveyor on the United States-Mexico Boundary," 436; WEBER and ELDER, *FIASCO*, xx-xxi.

¹³ EMORY, *Report*, 1; GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 128–130, 158; WEBER and ELDER, *FIASCO*, xix; REBERT, Paula (2001), *La Gran Línea. Mapping the United States-Mexico Boundary, 1849–1857*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 22.

ty of civilian employees, such as a physician, an interpreter, a quartermaster, a laundress, a carpenter, and a draftsman as well as cooks, butchers, tailors, several servants, instrument carriers, target men, chain men, and stone cutters. As the task of the boundary commission was not only surveying and marking the boundary, but also scientific exploration, there were meteorologists, geologists, botanists, and naturalists, magnetic, barometric, and thermometric recorders, mining engineers, and artists in the survey party.¹⁴

Most of them received their appointment in February, 1849 and were supposed to meet the Mexican commissioners in May, 1849 and start the boundary survey from a point specified by the peace treaty south of San Diego Bay. However, not all left for San Diego under similar circumstances. Soon after the group's organization, news reached the East Coast of the discovery of gold in California and caused such congestion of available modes of transportation that it looked as if the boundary survey would have to be delayed. Most of the crew eventually obtained passage on several ships departing from New Orleans for the Isthmus of Panama, where they planned to make connections with steamers leaving for the West Coast.¹⁵

By the middle of March, 1849, most of the commission's major members had arrived in Chagres, Panama.¹⁶ There their progress, however, was impeded by some four thousand gold seekers who anxiously awaited steamers to complete their journey to California. The few vessels that were available quickly began charging such an enormous price for tickets and were so crowded that the survey party soon found itself virtually stranded. Emory did not consider it a waste of time, instead "seeing that there was little probability of our obtaining passage to San Diego before the middle of May, I unpacked the instruments, and set them up for the double purpose of practicing my assistants and making observations at Panama for latitude and longitude, magnetic dip and intensity, and other phenomena."¹⁷ At long last, after a wait of two months during which a cholera epidemic also hit the region, a ship was finally secured to transport some of the commission to San Diego.

They reached California on June 1, much later than they should have. However, they were surprised to discover that the Mexican commission had not arrived yet. Experiencing delays comparable to their American counterparts, they only arrived in the San Diego harbor on July 3. Commissioner General Pedro García Conde was accompanied by surveyor José Salazar Ylarregui, two first class engineers, two second class engineers, and Felipe de Iturbide, a son of the Mexican Emperor, who served as official translator. About a hundred and fifty soldiers also accompanied the Mexicans.¹⁸

The joint Boundary Commission held its first meeting on July 6, 1849.¹⁹ The essential task facing the delegation involved the plotting of the boundary's western terminus in the Pacific, and the exact location of the confluence of the Gila and Colorado rivers. According to the terms of the Treaty,

¹⁴ EMORY, *Report*, 3; GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 158; REBERT, "A Civilian Surveyor on the United States-Mexico Boundary," 439; WEBER and ELDER, *FIASCO*, xx.

¹⁵ GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 158; WEBER and ELDER, *FIASCO*, 2.

¹⁶ EMORY, *Report*, 1; WERNE, *The Imaginary Line*, 22.

¹⁷ EMORY, *Report*, 2.

¹⁸ EMORY, *Report*, 3; GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 159-160; WEBER and ELDER, *FIASCO*, 47.

¹⁹ EMORY, *Report*, 4; WERNE, *The Imaginary Line*, 28.

The boundary line between the two Republics shall commence in the Gulf of Mexico, three leagues from land, opposite the mouth of the Rio Grande, otherwise called Rio Bravo del Norte, or opposite the mouth of its deepest branch, if it should have more than one branch emptying directly into the sea; from thence up the middle of that river, following the deepest channel, where it has more than one, to the point where it strikes the southern boundary of New Mexico; thence, westwardly, along the whole southern boundary of New Mexico (which runs north of the town called Paso) to its western termination; thence, northward, along the western line of New Mexico, until it intersects the first branch of the river Gila; (or if it should not intersect any branch of that river, then to the point on the said line nearest to such branch, and thence in a direct line to the same); thence down the middle of the said branch and of the said river, until it empties into the Rio Colorado; thence across the Rio Colorado, following the division line between Upper and Lower California, to the Pacific Ocean.

The southern and western limits of New Mexico, mentioned in the article, are those laid down in the map entitled "Map of the United Mexican States, as organized and defined by various acts of the Congress of said republic, and constructed according to the best authorities. Revised edition. Published at New York, in 1847, by J. Disturnell," of which map a copy is added to this treaty, bearing the signatures and seals of the undersigned Plenipotentiaries.²⁰

Major Emory took charge of determining the initial point in the Pacific, while Gray surveyed the port of San Diego. One of Emory's assistants, Whipple, who had recently arrived from Panama, was given the task of charting the junction of the Gila and Colorado. The job of gaining a basic knowledge of some of the topography between these two points was assigned to Lieutenant Hardcastle.²¹ On each of these operations a Mexican engineer was on hand to verify the results by means of his own observations. In fact, the Mexicans, because of their inferior instruments, were forced to depend on the services of the American engineers.

For most of the survey the two commissions worked together, often complementing and always double-checking each other's work. Trouble arose, however, when it came to marking the boundary between El Paso and the Rio Grande. The Peace Treaty said that the boundary should turn west from the river at a point eight miles north of El Paso. But the astronomical readings taken by the surveyors showed that El Paso was in fact half a degree (about thirty-six miles) farther south and about a hundred and thirty miles farther west than the Disturnell map, which was designated in the Peace Treaty as the source showing the points of reference, indicated.²² The disputed area involved a few thousand square miles and the territory had about three thousand inhabitants. The biggest problem was that if the inaccurate map was used in marking the boundary, the United States stood to lose the Mesilla Valley, which appeared to be the only practicable pathway for a southern rail route to the Pacific Ocean. After four months of arguing the American and the Mexican commissioners made a compromise. They agreed that the treaty map would prevail with regard to

²⁰ ISRAEL, *Major Peace Treaties*, 736–737.

²¹ EMORY, *Report*, 4; GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 161; WEBER and ELDER, *FIASCO*, 49.

²² The Disturnell map was published in New York in 1847. GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 155.

El Paso, so the Mesilla valley would remain part of Mexico, but the boundary would be extended a hundred and twenty miles farther west than the Disturnell map had shown before it turned north toward the Gila River. Emory, Lieutenant Gray, and southern Democrats in Congress, who favored a Texas-New Mexico rail route attacked Commissioner Bartlett for surrendering the Mesilla Valley and Congress blocked further funding of the boundary survey. The Mexican government, on the other hand, welcomed the compromise and made an effort to extend the jurisdiction and administration of the neighboring province, Chihuahua over the Mesilla Valley.²³

In the end, surveying and marking the boundary was carried out according to the Bartlett-Conde compromise, and on December 22, 1852, the American boundary commission was disbanded. Bartlett and Emory left for Washington, where they arrived by February, 1853.²⁴

Between 1849 and 1853 the American and Mexican commissions had performed an enormous task in surveying the border under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, despite difficult circumstances and undependable support from their respective governments. Just as the surveyors completed their work, however, a new treaty made parts of their survey irrelevant. The region of present-day southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico was purchased by the United States for 10 million dollars in a treaty signed by James Gadsden, the American ambassador to Mexico at the time, on the 30th of December, 1853.²⁵ The purchase also included the Mesilla Valley, the debated area during the Mexican-American boundary survey. The lands south of the Gila River and west of the Rio Grande – a region of 29,670 square miles – were the last major territorial acquisition in the contiguous United States, which was thought essential for the construction of a transcontinental railroad along a deep southern route.²⁶

The Treaty had again called for the U.S. and Mexico to appoint boundary commissioners, who would meet in El Paso three months after the exchange of ratifications and begin surveying.²⁷ Once again Maj. William H. Emory won the assignment, but this time he held the positions of commissioner, surveyor, and chief astronomer. He would not have to answer to a civilian political appointee, so he could work much faster. He reached El Paso at the end of November, 1854, and by the end of September the following year he and his Mexican counterpart, once again José Salazar Ylarregui, had finished the fieldwork.²⁸

²³ EMORY, *Report*, 16–19, 20–21; GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 173–177, 191; KLUGER, Richard (2007), *Seizing Destiny. How America Grew from Sea to Shining Sea*, New York, Vintage Books, Alfred A. Knopf, 491–492; REINHARTZ, Dennis – SAXON, Gerald D. (eds.) (2005), *Mapping and Empire: Soldier-Engineers on the Southwestern Frontier*, Austin, Texas, University of Texas Press, 163; WEBER and ELDER, *FIASCO*, 162–164.

²⁴ GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 193.

²⁵ “Gadsden Treaty,” Mexico City, December 30, 1853, in ISRAEL, *Major Peace Treaties*, 753–758; “Gadsden Szerződés, Mexico City, 1853. December 30,” I., II., IV. cikkely [Article I., II., IV.], in KÖKÉNY, *Békeszerződés*, 27–29.

²⁶ GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 194–195; KLUGER, *Seizing Destiny*, 499–504; MEINIG, *The Shaping of America*, 152–153.

²⁷ ISRAEL, *Major Peace Treaties*, 754.

²⁸ GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 195–197.

The official *Report on the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey* of the American Boundary Commission was published between 1857 and 1859 in two volumes.²⁹ Major William H. Emory's name appeared on the title page as author, but in fact it was an anthology of reports and studies by many authors. They make up an encyclopedia of the Southwest as the *Report* presents not only the results of the boundary survey, but also the results of the scientific investigations connected with the survey. There are essays on the geography of the region and the Native American communities that inhabited it. There are also articles on geology, paleontology, meteorology, magnetism, minerals, and plants; and vast catalogs of the plants, animals, and fossils that the boundary commission's collectors gathered for study by scientists.

The *Report* is one of the most highly illustrated government publications of the nineteenth century. In addition to the pictures in the natural history chapters of the *Report*, there are also scenes of Native American and frontier society. Views of cities and forts built by Spanish and Anglo settlers further reveal border life. The *Report* contains three maps, including a general map of the West, a geological map, and a map of magnetic observations. Conspicuously absent from the *Report*, however, are any maps of the boundary. Although at least some of the boundary maps were originally planned for publication with the *Report*, the American Congress did not provide funds and they were never published.³⁰

The administrative center for the Boundary Commission was in Washington D. C. It was directed by the topographical engineers, who superintended the production of the boundary maps and the work of civilian clerks, who worked on computations, compilations, and drew all the finished maps. Map-making of the U.S.-Mexico boundary actually began while the survey was in progress. Both the American and Mexican commissions completed the final maps at the boundary office in Washington, D.C. First established in 1850 and finally closed at the end of 1857, the office was the scene of seven years of mapmaking – a lengthier project than the fieldwork. In the end, the official U.S.-Mexico boundary maps were completed in two sets, one made by the American commission and one made by the Mexican commission. Each set consisted of fifty-four sectional sheets showing the boundary line and the territory in the United States and Mexico adjacent to the line. They were numbered from map “No. 1” on the Gulf of Mexico to “No. 54” on the Pacific Coast. Most maps were at a scale of 1:60,000. There were also four index maps of the entire boundary and five maps of islands in the Rio Grande.³¹

Although the boundary office was at all times under the charge of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, the people who drew the boundary maps were hired from various backgrounds – some were artists, some engineers, some engravers – but all were experienced topographers. William Emory appointed George Thom to supervise the boundary office, and when the American Boundary Commission was reorganized under the Gadsden Treaty of 1853, Thom was again appointed to direct it.³² When the office was revitalized, he needed to hire additional drawing staff – including some Hungarians, who arrived in the

²⁹ EMORY, *Report*, Vol. I, Washington, 1858, Vol. II, Washington, 1859.

³⁰ EMORY, *Report*, 2; GOETZMANN, *Army Exploration*, 198; REBERT, “A Civilian Surveyor on the United States-Mexico Boundary,” 449–450.

³¹ REBERT, *La Gran Línea*, 55–58; REBERT, “A Civilian Surveyor on the United States-Mexico Boundary,” 450–451.

³² REBERT, *La Gran Línea*, 46–47.

United States after the revolution of 1848-1849. One of them was Károly László. He drafted seven maps, among them the five sheets that showed the islands in the Rio Grande. The Mexican contingent was too small to fulfill their large share of the office work, so it often happened that individuals who drew maps for the U.S. also drafted maps for the Mexican commission. Károly László did so, too.³³

Who was he? Károly László was a Hungarian engineer who fought in the Hungarian war of independence in 1848-1849. After its failure and the surrender of the Hungarian army in August, 1849, fled to the Ottoman Empire and became the secretary of Lajos Kossuth who was one of the political leaders of the Hungarian fight for freedom. László accompanied Kossuth on his tour in the United States from January to July, 1852 when he tried to gain support for the Hungarian cause. When Kossuth returned to Europe, László and quite a few other Hungarians decided to stay in the U. S. He started to work as an engineer.³⁴ He kept a diary, which gives us an almost daily account of his life in Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and America.³⁵

In connection with the Mexican-American Boundary Survey we learn from his Diary that he was hired by William Emory and received a one-hundred-dollar monthly salary for six hours of work per day starting on January 1, 1856.³⁶ At the beginning of February of the same year a military engineer from the Pacific Railroad Office, where Károly László had also worked before, asked him if he could work for six hours a day on a map of Florida. László accepted the offer and from February 5 on he worked twelve hours every day. From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on maps of the Mexican-American Boundary Commission and from 7 to 9 a.m. and from 4 to 8 p.m. on the map of Florida. In his Diary he acknowledged the fact that a 12-hour working day was strenuous, but he also remarked that the 220 dollars he would earn a month was much more than his one-year salary in Hungary had been. He did not find the work very hard and noted that at the railroad companies he had only earned 65 dollars a month.³⁷

In the middle of May, he finished the Florida map and took another part-time job as a mapmaker at the Pacific Railroad Company and earned 182 dollars in two months. He was so busy that he only had time to continue his Diary when he was done with the part-time

³³ Ibid. 48; REBERT, "A Civilian Surveyor on the United States-Mexico Boundary," 452.

³⁴ PORDÁN, Ildikó (1996), *László Károly, egy Kossuth-emigráns sorsa, írásai tükrében* [The Fate of a Kossuth Refugee, Károly László, as Reflected in his Writings], PhD diss., Szeged: József Attila Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kara, 3–4; VENKOVITS, Balázs (2018), „*Mi otthon félre vagyunk vezetve.*” *Magyar utazók és kivándorlók Mexikóban a 19. század első felében* [„We are misled at home”. Hungarian travellers and emigrants in Mexico in the first half of the 19th century], Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 80–82. On Károly László’s exile in the Ottoman Empire and on his journey to America and on Kossuth’s stay in the United States see LÁSZLÓ, Károly (1887), *Naplo-töredék az 1849-iki menekülteket, internáltakat, különösen Kossuthot és környezetét illetőleg Törökországban és az Amerikai Egyesült-Államokban* [Diary Extracts Concerning the Refugees and the Interned of 1849, in Particular Kossuth and his Circle in the Ottoman Empire and the United States of America], Budapest, Franklin Társulat, Magyar Irod. Intézet és Könyvnyomda.

³⁵ LÁSZLÓ, Károly, *Napló* [Diary], Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Kt. Oct. Hung. 720.

³⁶ Ibid. VIII. 212.

³⁷ Ibid. 212.

job in the middle of July. It was after that that he started to work for the Mexican Boundary Commission, too.³⁸

1856 was the peak year of map production in the Boundary Office. More people worked in the office that year than at any other time, with many new individuals hired to do the drawing. According to the office accounts there were two draftsmen of Hungarian origin who were also employed – Félix Nemegyei and Albert Zeyk, and each of them completed two boundary maps.³⁹ Nemegyei was a military engineer who played an active role in the Hungarian war of independence, fled to the Ottoman Empire and from there travelled to the United States in 1851.⁴⁰ Zeyk originally studied law, then fought in the Hungarian war of independence. He lived in exile in the Ottoman Empire, then in Paris and London, where he studied chemistry and engineering. In 1850 he travelled to South America and worked on the regulation of rivers in Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay. In 1853 he got shipwrecked on the La Plata river and was saved by an American ship that took him to the United States, where he joined the navy.⁴¹ Károly László only mentioned Nemegyei's name in his Diary, who worked with him in the same office as a drafter.⁴²

As the work in the Boundary Office was winding up, Károly László started to look for new opportunities and on January 19, 1857 he signed a contract with topographical engineer John Pope, to draw maps and then accompany him on his explorations of the Great American Desert. Then, at the beginning of April he got another offer to work as an engineer on the construction of the St. Croix – Lake Superior Railroad. He was promised a salary of 1200 dollars per year and full boarding. Károly László accepted the offer, so on May 1 he had to give up his jobs in Washington, D.C. On May 12, 1857 he left for Lake Superior.⁴³

1856 was a busy year for the Boundary Office as well as for Károly László, and it was also a year when his legal status in the United States changed. According to his Diary, he received his Certificate of American citizenship on November 17, 1856. He translated the original text in his Diary.⁴⁴ According to the Certificate he applied for naturalization on February 17, 1853 in the state of New York, where he declared that his place of birth was Hungary and he was a subject of the Hungarian king and the Austrian emperor. He officially applied for naturalization and declared under oath that he voluntarily wanted to become a citizen of the United States, and that “he relinquished his subjugation and oath of allegiance to any Duke, authority, state, or any ruler, and in particular to the king of Hungary and the emperor of Austria, as required by the relevant laws of the American Congress”.⁴⁵

³⁸ Ibid. 213, 220.

³⁹ REBERT, *La Gran Línea*, 51–52, 199, 201.

⁴⁰ BONA, Gábor (2015), *Tábornokok és törzstisztek az 1848/49. évi szabadságharcban*. [Generals and Field Officers in the 1848/49 War of Independence], Miskolc, Miskolci Egyetemi Kiadó, II, 444–445.

⁴¹ VIDA, István Kornél (2011), *Világostól Appomatoxig: magyarok az amerikai polgárháborúban* [From Világos to Appomatox: Hungarians in the American Civil War], Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 209–210.

⁴² LÁSZLÓ, *Napló*, VIII. 217.

⁴³ Ibid. 221.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 217–218.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

He appeared in front of the court again in November, 1856, where Thomas Jekyll, who was his artist-friend who also drew several maps of the boundary survey, testified that Károly László had been residing in the United States for five years during which period he had not left the country. Jekyll also confirmed that László was a man of moral integrity whose conduct was in accordance with the Constitution of the United States of America. Károly László himself needed to take an oath that he would live according to the principles of the Constitution of the United States.⁴⁶

When Károly László explained in his Diary why he wanted American citizenship, his argument was the following. "In the United States of America, an immigrant who does not even want to be a citizen of the country, can still trade, have a job, hold an office (except for government positions), and have property – until his death –, and is treated equally in front of the law. But, he does not have the right to vote (for the representatives of a town, a state, Congress, or for the President); and his legal heirs cannot inherit his property, neither can he pass it on in a will, not even to his wife or children, but it will pass on to the government. And if he goes abroad, the United States cannot defend him, [...] while a citizen, wherever he is, is protected under the banner of the U. States."⁴⁷ Károly László stated in his Diary that it was mostly for the two latter reasons that he decided to apply for citizenship. He bought property in the United States and wanted to keep it, and then leave it for his mother, sister, or close relatives. The other reason, he argued, was that by gaining American citizenship "I would be free to travel home to visit, and if I don't say or don't do anything against the government there, I will be safe under the protection of the banner of the United States of America."⁴⁸

In conclusion we can say that all this indicates that Károly László decided to apply for American citizenship for practical reasons. His character and identity were shaped by the American environment, but I think he only intended to stay in the United States as long as he found economic opportunities, and was ready to move on or move back to Hungary whenever the opportunity arose. We know that after working on the St. Croix – Lake Superior Railroad, in 1857 he moved to Mexico and worked on the survey of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the construction of a railroad there.⁴⁹ He returned to Hungary in 1867 – following the Compromise and the establishment of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy when the political refugees of the 1848-1849 war of independence were granted amnesty.⁵⁰

The way Károly László described his return to Hungary in his Diary tells a lot about his views and identity.

"September 30, 1867. Naturally, everyone would think that after being away and being displaced for 18 years, I was overwhelmed by emotions, kissed the ground and shed tears of joy upon my return when I crossed the border of my mother country. It did not happen. I was happy that I could embrace my dear old mother again and

⁴⁶ Ibid. 218.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 219.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ On Károly László's activity and experience in Mexico see VENKOVITS, "Mi otthon félre vagyunk vezetve," 88–111; SZENTE-VARGA, Mónika (2000), "Desde una visión húngara: Los escritos de Károly László sobre México, 1857-1865," *Tzintzun. Revista de Estudios Históricos* 72 (2), 9–43.

⁵⁰ PORDÁN, *László Károly*, 4–5.

could support her and I was happy to see my [...] relatives again, but the joy I felt when I saw my motherland again was not ravishing, because the country was not what it had been in 1848. Its ruler is still the same bloodthirsty young emperor [ie. Francis Joseph] and the majority of its parliament is not made up of good patriots, but such people who made a compromise with the Austrian emperor [...] only to serve their personal peace and not of the interests of their country. [...] I was not joyful to see my homeland again, which is not my home any more. It is not, because I am a citizen of the free and great American Republic and will remain so at least up until Hungary becomes an independent kingdom or republic. When I received my American citizenship I swore to relinquish all subjugation and allegiance to the emperor of Austria and I intend to keep my word.”⁵¹

⁵¹ LÁSZLÓ, *Napló*, 1867. szeptember 30. Quoted by PORDÁN, *László Károly*, 78–79.