

About Agoston Haraszthy

By Verne Seth Pease

Note: Count Haraszthy and J. C. Grapel opened the first store on the Baraboo Rapids. More information regarding Haraszthy and the store can be found in **Baraboo Wisconsin 1850-2010..Volume II..Trivia Section IV.**

In the comitat of Bacs-Bodrog (Bacska), Hungary about the year 1810, was born into the world that restless, pioneering spirit, known in central Wisconsin as Count Agoston Haraszthy. The location of the family home, Futak, is on the east bank of the Danube, somewhat south of the town of Zombor, county seat for Bacs-Bodrog, which lies immediately to the south of the compound comitat of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kis Kun, in the elbow-bend of the Danube, which bounds it on the west and south. Agoston was the only son of Charles Haraszthy. The exact date of his birth has not been discovered; but his eldest son, Gaza,¹ enlisted in the army of the United States July 31, 1849, which would seem to raise the presumption that the natal day is somewhat earlier than 1812..the date usually given in publications² and fixed by the surviving members of the family with whom it is possible to communicate. Besides this presumptive proof, is to be considered the memory of men now living, who knew Haraszthy during the forties, and who without hesitation say that he was then a man more than 40 years of age. Supposing Haraszthy was born in 1812, and the son, Gaza, was only seventeen years of age at the time of his enlistment, then the child was born when Haraszthy was only 20 years old. This is not impossible, but is a crowding of events out of the usual course.

1 Arpad Haraszthy, Memorial, California commandery, Loyal Legion, Circular 49 (Nov. 15, 1900).

2 Wis. Hist. Colls., xiv, p. 79; Menefee, Historical and Descriptive Sketch Book of Napa, Sonoma, etc., (Napa, 1873), pp. 287-290. From portrait In Portage Public Library.

Of his ancestry, little is known from record. It is claimed he was of ancient lineage, and this is probably true, for the Magyars

were a people to whom antiquity was a common heritage, family pride a positive impetus, and ancestral glory a tangible asset. During his residence in Wisconsin (1840-48) he was universally known as Count Haraszthy. Noble lineage in Hungary is not necessarily followed by a title so exalted as count, for there are many of lesser degree. It is said that he inherited the rank of "Mocha,"³ which in feudal days would have entitled him to a retinue of three hundred noblemen on state occasions or in war. The same authority states that the family record extended to the year 1214; and while a written account is not available, the presumption seems to favor an ancient ancestry and some degree of nobility. It is sometimes stated that the grandfather of the subject of this sketch became possessed of democratic convictions and renounced all heraldic pretensions and hereditaments. Certain it is, after leaving Wisconsin, Haraszthy seems to have given up his title of count, and was thenceforth known as Colonel Haraszthy; even his son, Arpad, in his contributions to periodical literature, refers to his father as "the late Colonel Haraszthy."⁴ Yet there was about the man a certain bearing, natural and unstudied that gave to the title of count an air of fitness and plausibility. Self-contained, commanding, superior, without the suggestion of haughtiness — he was one of those unusual characters to whose mien and name humanity accords a titled preface.

3 Letter from Madam Ida C. Hancock, and miscellaneous letters and data regarding Haraszthy, in the Wisconsin Historical Library.

4 Overland Monthly, January, 1872. Wisconsin Historical Society.

Quite the reverse was Charles Haraszthy, father of our subject. A man of scholarly habit, he set himself diligently, upon his arrival in Wisconsin during the summer of 1842, to acquiring the English language, which he soon mastered because of his proficiency in Latin. In him were none of the aggressive traits that distinguished the son. It seemed as if the fiery blood of the Magyar nobility had

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passed one generation in its flow, so gentle was the elder man. It is more than possible that the Haraszthy's had joined with many others in renouncing the old feudal titles, as there had been at one time almost a mania for such renunciation, especially by the middle class and lesser nobility. From 1301 to 1526, under the elective monarchy, the titled gentry had steadily encroached on the rights of the peasantry and middle classes, until these elements of the population were reduced to serfdom and penury. When the peasants, tradesmen, and manufacturers would no longer yield to the rapacious nobility, the warfare became internecine the strong nobles against the weak. Then Hungary awoke many of the nobility became democratic, divided their estates among their serfs, and openly joined the downtrodden in a general demand for the restoration of the old Magyar liberties. The Haraszthy's may have taken part in this general movement. It seems certain that the family was at one time of the privileged class; when the remnant of it appeared in Wisconsin, Charles Haraszthy was the living embodiment of the doctrine of the equality of man; his son Agoston shared his democratic convictions, and yet had the bearing of one in whom centuries of aristocratic ancestry were playing a potent, but unconscious influence.

Early in the spring of 1840 Agoston Haraszthy, with a kinsman, Charles Halasz, set out for America. The latter was young, but eighteen years of age. Whether Haraszthy was in any degree connected with the liberal movement then developing in Hungary under the leadership of Baron Nicholas Wesselényi and Louis Kossuth, is not clear, although it is remembered that Haraszthy claimed this as a motive influence.

From a study of his character one cannot well understand how a revolution could be brewing in his neighborhood, especially

one that invited to daring and adventure, without securing his participation. Up to 1839 the liberal movement had been largely a matter of intrigue and secret organization; but by then it had gained such strength that the Viennese court arbitrarily imprisoned the two most intelligent and dangerous reformers, Wesselényi and Kossuth. Many conspirators took to flight, and Haraszthy may have been of the number. But the late Charles Halasz, before the Sauk County Old-Settlers Association, at its first annual meeting, said, "We left Hungary for no reason, except to wander.⁵ They shipped from Hamburg March 3, 1840, on the packet "Sampson," with the intention of going to Florida — a section of the country then in the world's eye. But on ship-board they fell in with Adolph Rendtorff,⁶ a German immigrant bound for the Northwest; and it was agreed that the three, with Edmond Rendtorff, a brother of Adolph, already in Illinois, should settle together. Wisconsin was chosen as their future home, because of the description in Capt. Frederick Marryat's *A Diary in America* (1839). This widely-read author of that day had been entertained handsomely in Fort Winnebago,⁷ and had navigated the Wisconsin River from Portage to Prairie du Chien, and had well described the beauty and richness of the country through which he passed. To make the destination of the adventure certain, some Englishmen, who were taken on the ship off the south of England, bound for Mineral Point, Wisconsin, to investigate the lead deposits, added their testimony.⁸ The "Sampson" landed in New York, and the party proceeded up the Hudson by boat and to Buffalo by the Erie Canal. Here they shipped by steamer to Milwaukee, arriving early in May. At Detroit Adolph Rendtorff temporarily parted company with Haraszthy and Halasz, going direct to Illinois to join his brother Edmond who had then been in this country seventeen months.

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5 Sauk County (Wis.) Old Settlers' Association Transactions, 1872, p. 17.

6 Outline Sketches of Sauk County, 11, p. 63.

7 Wis. Hist. Colls. xiv, pp. 94, 96.

8 Sketches of Sauk County, ii, p. '59, Wisconsin Historical Society.

After a few days in Milwaukee, Haraszthy and Halasz bought three horses and secured an interpreter. The services of this functionary were said by Halasz to have cost them two dollars a day. They reconnoitered the country to the west of Milwaukee, plat in hand, and finally came upon a stretch that suited them. Why they did not proceed at once to the banks of the Wisconsin River, according to pre-arrangement, does not appear; but they settled upon a tract of land near Rock River, above Lake Koshkonong,⁹ made an entry

of the land, had a log house and a shed built. An ox-team was purchased, and some implements with which to begin farming operations; and such goods as they had brought with them from the old country were moved from Milwaukee, and life took on a business face in the heart of the wood. But hunting was good and fish were easily taken, and these pleasing occupations divided the time of the adventurers with the more serious matter of carving a home out of the forest. But when grass on the nearby marshes reached good height, they worked hard cutting a winter supply of hay for their cattle. The shed was well stocked, for all the allurements of the chase; although Halasz afterward spoke of the hired help that shared with the inexperienced pioneers the burden of the labors.

9 Ibid, p. 60.

The region in which they settled has long been famous for soil fertility and also as a breeding-place for a great variety of mosquitoes. It seems that they were very troublesome of nights, and in that early day there was no available means for protection from their ravages. The pioneers suffered, and on a particular night a fire was kindled to smudge the pest back to its native heath in the

adjacent marsh. But the mosquitoes were persistent, and in desperation Haraszthy took a wisp of dry hay, and lighting it swung the torch about. A spark lit in the hay shed. In a moment the visible product of the days of toil on the wild-hay marsh was in flames. Several loaded pistols and double-barreled guns had been deposited on the hay, and a keg of powder had been placed therein to avoid the sparks that were inevitable in a cabin of primitive construction and household operation. The adventurers ran for their lives; the flames made a clean sweep of the permanent improvements; the guns, pistols, and powder keg performed their functions in due time. But the horses and oxen were unscathed, and with these as a nucleus, the pioneers set off to the westward to hunt the El Dorado of Captain Manyafs Dairy in America. It is said that about the time of the catastrophe, they learned that they were trespassers on the land they had occupied for a few months. The land-office had erred in its plat, for the tract had been entered by others the previous year.

From Lake Koshkonong they made their way to Janesville, then containing but one log house. On to Madison, the territorial capital and a thriving village; then to Berry Haney's, now Cross Plains; and finally to Wisconsin River, at the point agreed upon with Adolph Rendtorff, upon the packet "Sampson." As they reached the summit of the bluffs that skirt this beautiful stream on the southeast, and looked on the panorama stretching away to the northwest Haraszthy gave expression to his pleasure in these words: Eureka! Eureka! Italia! Italia!¹⁰

10 Sauk County old Settlers' Association Trans, 1872, p. 7.
Wisconsin Historical Society.

This was near the middle of July, 1840. Their paradise was already claimed by a few Americans, and Haraszthy bought a small piece of river frontage from Burk Fairchild, one of the earliest settlers. A return trip was made to Milwaukee for supplies, and it is

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said that the summer and fall were mostly given over to the hunting of deer, prairie chicken, and pigeon. The serious affairs of life occupied enough of their time to arrange for the building of a log house, where they resided when, in the autumn, Adolph and Edmond Rendtorff joined them in accordance with their pre-arrangement. In his written recollections, Edmond Rendtorff says that when he and his brother Adolph arrived at Prairie du Sac they were met by Haraszthy and Halasz and "some Germans they had working for them." What the nature of this employment was, does not appear, although it is possible they had already started upon some of the many projects of development that they afterward undertook — all before the condition of the country justified them.¹¹

Latter in the fall Haraszthy made a trip to Milwaukee, and while there made the acquaintance of an Englishman named Robert Bryant a man of social worth and some financial resources. This chance acquaintance marked the beginning of an epoch for the little settlement on Wisconsin River. Mr. Bryant was induced, by Haraszthy's eloquence, to visit the proposed town-site, where now stands the village of Sauk City. A partnership was arranged between Bryant and Haraszthy, probably covering a wide range of enterprise, although the building of a town was the principal undertaking of their joint effort. Bryant bought of Berry Haney, the reformed stage driver, who was the first upon the land, his claim, paying \$1,000 for it. Although there were few public records at that time, where conveyances might be legally preserved (the land office for this section was not yet opened), it seems that this transfer covered the present town-site of Sauk City and extended back some distance from the river. If Bryant became a member of the pioneer colony for any considerable time, it does not appear from any of the earliest recorded instruments bearing his name. He conveyed first as Robert

Bryant, of Sauk County, Territory of Wisconsin, and the year following as a "citizen of Milwaukee." Bryant bought Haney's claim apparently late in the fall of 1840, presumably on the joint account of Haraszthy and Bryant; but when the land came upon the market in October, 1843, it was entered by Charles Haraszthy, father of Agoston.

11 Sketches of Sauk County, ii, p. 71.

How the year of 1841 was passed is not recorded, unless we accept the statement made by Mr., Halasz at the old settlers' meeting, as covering the life they led at this time. "Why we stayed on the Wisconsin River we knew not. We were not used to that kind of scenery, nor to the mode of getting a living. But we stayed." They may have had the Haney claim surveyed during that summer, as has been stated, although the plat was not recorded until the year 1845. It is more probable that the allurements of hunting and fishing drew their attention, for their commercial and industrial enterprises were then scarcely begun. It is probable that some food crops were grown on the open prairie, an easy task at any time, although it is not to be presumed that more was raised than was needed for use by man and beast in that immediate community, as there was no market. The Rev. T. M. Fullerton, a frontier itinerant preacher, read from his journal, before the Sauk County Old Settlers Association,¹² the following: "June 23, 1841 — There is here a Hungarian Count — so he calls himself — who claims to have large quantities of money, and is expending it liberally in improvements. There is also an Englishman here [Bryant, of course] who claims to have been a Lord in the old country. He is in partnership with the Count. They both look like savages, wearing a long beard above as well as below the mouth. And they are the great men of the place, and others adopt their customs, and make themselves as ridiculous as possible." At the time

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of this reading (1872), Mr. Fullerton wore a beard, and confessed to the "havoc 30 years will make in one's opinions of taste." As a young preacher, ardent and zealous, he foreswore whiskers and evidently all who cultivated such facial appendages; but his mere description of the personal characteristics of Agoston Haraszthy has value, because it is not the only one extant for that period of his life.

12 Transactions, 1872, p. 11. Wisconsin Historical Society.

In the spring of 1842 Count Haraszthy returned to Europe and the following summer brought out his wife, Eleanora de Dodinsky; their three sons, Gaza, Attila F., and Arpad; his father and mother. The mother soon died, and the father afterward married the mother, or mother-in-law, of the late William H. Clark, Sauk City's pioneer attorney. In the selection of names for his son Haraszthy had particular regard to the past glory of Hungary. Gaza, the eldest, was named for the fourth ducal sovereign (usually spelled Geyza), who came into power in the year 972 ; Attila F., for the hero, more or less mythical, under whose strong hand the Huns crossed the river Don, established themselves in Pannonia and threw off the authority of Bome; Arpad the conqueror, was the first of the ducal dynasty that began in 889, the son of Almos, who led the Magyar hordes over the Carpathians and subjugated Hungary and Transylvania; Bela, the youngest son, born at Sauk City, was named for the sixth king, or tenth sovereign, of the Arpad dynasty, who ascended the throne in the year 1061.

From the time of his arrival the elder Haraszthy became intensely popular. We are told that all who knew him in his frontier home regarded him with esteem and veneration. He was generally known as the "Old General," although he was sometimes spoken of as the "Old Count." His studies had led him into natural science, and soon after arriving in Wisconsin he opened an apothecary shop, and was accounted a good chemist. This drug store he continued to

conduct until late in the year 1848, when, with his son Agoston and their families, he set out for Madison to prepare for the overland trip to California. Many tales are yet current of the parental devotion of the gentle father to the enthusiastic son. "Mein son, Agoston," was the most agreeable subject for the father's conversation; the adventures, the commercial enterprises, the hunting excursions of the younger Haraszthy, were topics that called forth hearty praise from the elder. When the son was at home, the father haunted his presence and followed him about from place to place. He seemed to worship in the son what he lacked, in his own individuality - the spirit of daring. In his reference to the Haraszthy before the Sauk County Old Settlers' Association, the late William H. Clark said: "Who that ever knew can forget the 'Old General', the father of the count! Father and only son and child, in the structure of their minds, in their habits, tastes, and dispositions, they were the very antipodes of each other, as unlike as ever could be. Nevertheless their attachment for each other was unbounded. Naught but death would separate them; where went the son, there accompanied or followed the father. In sunshine and storm, through good and evil report alike, he cherished mein son Agoston, as he called him."¹³

With the arrival of his family, Haraszthy began a series of industrial and commercial activities that lasted to the end of 1848, when he suddenly pulled up stakes and moved on westward. Unfortunately, the records of those early days are incomplete, and those who participated in or observed the erratic maneuvers of the firm of Haraszthy and Bryant have died. Hence, in an enumeration of their various enterprises, no effort at chronological order will be attempted, save as the surviving records cover all or a part of such endeavor. Frequent mention in the reminiscences of those days is made of Haraszthy's ventures in steam-boating. William H. Clark mentions that Agoston Haraszthy was engaged in Steam boating on

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the Wisconsin River and even on the lower Mississippi.¹⁴ This appears to be the only statement by a contemporary, of such extensive operations.

13 Sauk County Old Settlers' Association Trans., 1872, p. 8.

14 Ibid, p7. Wisconsin Historical Society.

Other such references base them on this of Clark's. But the written recollections of Edmond Rendtorff recount the adventures of the packet "Rock River," in which Haraszthy and Bryant owned a share. Rendtorff was for a time clerk, and recounts three round trips between Galena and Fort Snelling (St. Paul), and one trip from Fort Crawford (Prairie du Chien) to Fort Winnebago (Portage) and return. The craft was frozen in at its dock when they got back to Prairie du Chien, and, except for some thrilling experiences he had in attempting her release, no further mention is made of the "Rock River."¹⁵ The firm of Haraszthy and Bryant had a way of abandoning any enterprise of which it tired, with an abruptness really heroic; and it is probable that this precarious venture — for steam boating was then a dangerous and uncertain business — was dropped after one season's experience.

At an early day Haraszthy operated a ferry boat across the Wisconsin at Sauk City. The first record of it is in a deed of conveyance from Robert Bryant, dated October 14, 1844,¹⁶ granting to Agoston Haraszthy the right to land ferry boats at any point on the river without incurring liability to him (Bryant), and in which the grantor bound himself not to transfer to any other person a like privilege. Haraszthy sought in this document to make his ferry franchise exclusive and perpetual. This conveyance is the first recorded in Sauk County bearing the name of Haraszthy. The ferry was operated many years. John C. Hawley, of Mazomanie, Dane County, worked on the boat, beginning June, 1847, and writes under

date of January, 1906,¹⁷ that the boat, at the time of his service, was under a fourteen years' lease to Robert Richards. The boy Hawley knew Haraszthy and has recorded a lively picture of his personal appearance and characteristics, as will appear later in this sketch. This boat was pushed with poles, no other power being used, and it was Hawley's duty to steer it. Foot passengers were carried over in a skiff. Soon after, horse-power was instituted to move the ponderous craft which had capacity for three teams of wagons.

15 Sketches of Sauk County, ii, p. 71.

16 Sauk County register's office, i.

17 Miscellaneous MSS. on Haraszthy, in Wisconsin Historical Library.

Early in the operations of the firm of Haraszthy and Bryant a brick yard was opened and the manufacture of brick under taken. This was in operation during 1842, as we find that October 25, of that year,¹⁸ Robert Bryant filed a mortgage to secure indebtedness of the firm to the amount of \$1,000, which mortgage covered all the brick in the brick yard of Haraszthy and Bryant, seventeen cows, two yokes of cattle, a span of horses, sofa, and "peanna". There is now standing in Sauk City a dwelling, built for a store, which has in its walls brick from this ill-timed manufacturing enterprise. This house was built by Haraszthy and was occupied by him at the time he left for the West. This mortgage, covering so much of the personal property of the firm, even to household effects of value, would seem to discredit the statement that Haraszthy brought from Hungary with his family in the summer of 1842, "\$150,000 in money, besides family portraits and plates."¹⁹ Other mortgages that were recorded from time to time during his operations in Sauk City indicate that he had engaged in his undertakings no large sums of money as working capital.

18 Dane County register's office, i.

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19 Wis. Hist. Colls., xiv, p. 80. Wisconsin Historical Society.

All authorities, written and verbal, agree that early in their 20-partnership operations, a retail merchandising store was established. It is said that they erected a brick building to accommodate their business as early as 1842. That is possible, although the spring and early summer was given by the senior partner to his return to Hungary and the bringing out of his family. This store building still stands on the main street of Sauk City, facing the river near the bridge entrance, and is in a tolerable state of preservation. This commercial venture continued for several years, surely until the summer of 1847. Three mortgages were executed by Agoston Haraszthy to different mortgagees in New York City, evidently to secure indebtedness for merchandise. These mortgages were recorded in Dane County, probably because the first was made before Sauk County was fully organized and books of record provided. This is for \$1,000, dated August, 1844, to J. R. Walters. The second, dated November 7, 1846, was to secure \$2,000 to Alfred Edwards of New York; the third, likewise to Edwards, was dated March 13, 1847, to secure forty-four notes, to a dozen or more different creditors, abrogating \$8,273.71. Affairs then seem to have reached a crisis, which culminated that year in practical bankruptcy. Besides the store in Sauk City, Agoston Haraszthy conducted one at Baraboo, in connection with J. C. Grapel,²⁰ a brother-in-law of Edmond Rendtorff. The building in which this was located was the first frame structure to be erected in the Baraboo valley. It was built in the year 1845, although the land was not bought until February 20th of the next year, as appears in the record of a deed from Rosaline Peck.²¹ The consideration was \$1,000 and the conveyance covered one hundred and sixty acres. In his written, reminiscences, James A. Maxwell recites that he visited Baraboo in the winter of 1846-47 and "found Haraszthy with a store of goods"; in the spring of 1848 he

moved there and set up housekeeping in the Haraszthy store. The Baraboo venture closed between the winter of 1846-47 and the spring of 1848. Without doubt the small patronage of the sparsely settled country, the scarcity of money, and above all else, the freedom with which Haraszthy extended credit, proved his commercial undoing, the culmination coming soon in the wake of the heavy mortgage of March 31, 1847; for, when Charles Naffz arrived in Sauk City, July, 1848, Haraszthy was no longer a merchant.²²

20 Sketches of Sauk County, v, p. 8.

21 Sauk County register's office, i.

22 Statement of Naffz to the author.

On his character as a town builder and boomer, rests the fame of Agoston Haraszthy in Wisconsin. The fireside tales of his prowess as a hunter, his courtly manners, his distinguished and aristocratic bearing, his picturesque dress, fill the hills and valleys of Sauk County. But these are growing more vague and dim with the rushing years. Sometime early in the partnership career of Haraszthy and Bryant, there was platted, where is now the village of Sauk City, a town-site which was named Haraszthy. The plat was filed for record with the register of deeds for Sauk County on April 26, 1846, and was drawn into volume one this survey was made by Charles O. Baxter, at what time is not shown, and the plat made by the surveyor was certified by William H. Canfield, then county surveyor. This town site comprised fifty blocks, twenty-six of which were subdivided into lots. The survey still stands, except that some of the remaining twenty-four blocks have since been cut into lots, although the name has been twice changed — first to Westfield, then to Sauk City. The title to the lands covered by the survey and plat was in Charles Haraszthy, Robert Bryant, and Stephen Bates. It would seem that this plat was acknowledged and in a fashion dedicated, after

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Bryant had ceased to be a citizen of Sauk County, for his name appears to the instrument "by C. Haraszthy, agent." Bates, too, evidently was a non-resident owner, for he signed "by A. Haraszthy, agent" Mr. Canfield recollects that Baxter was engaged in 1841 to lay out the town-site,²³ but the probability is that nothing was done until a subsequent date. The acknowledgment and intended dedication were about contemporaneous with the recording, 1845.

23 Sketches of Sauk County, ii. Wisconsin Historical Society.

No sooner was the plat on record than a lively sale and transfer was begun. Lots singly and in bunches were transferred by Agoston Haraszthy, although it is not easy to discover from whom he acquired his right, since the recorded title was not in him; but this matter of legal ownership did not seem to daunt the adventurer. No less than fourteen transfers are noted in volume one of Sauk County records, covering thirty separate lots and one entire block. Ground was set aside for a school house; and lots 1 and 2, in block 31, were deeded to the Right Reverend John Martin Henni, Bishop of Milwaukee, on which was soon built a Catholic church. This ground is still used for the purpose, and is the seat of the oldest Catholic church and parochial school in Sauk County.²⁴ Many houses were built and a season of prosperity was ushered in. The German population increased, but it would seem that Edmond Rendtorff, with his brother Adolph, were the nucleus, and through them the earliest permanent residents of Teutonic blood were attracted to the town of Haraszthy. Many kins of the Rendtorffs came and remained as citizens.

24 This is probably the gift mentioned by Menefee {Napa, Sonoma, etc., p. 288), of a tract of land "upon which has since been erected an extensive monastery."

With all his diverse enterprises Haraszthy found time to dip

extensively into farming. The beautiful prairies to the north and west of his namesake village — fertile, easily broken, and marvelously productive — would have beckoned a less impulsive man. It does not appear that he held title to any considerable acreage; but as only a small portion of Sauk Prairie was then occupied by settlers or claimed by purchasers, he probably helped himself to such parts of the desirable land as he could use. At one time he had a contract to supply crops to Fort Winnebago. One crop that went to the fort was grown west of Sauk City, and as Haraszthy had given too much time to hunting, the harvesting was delayed until late in the fall. Then came a rush. The corn was pulled, thrown into wagon boxes, and the hands rode to the river, husking as they went at the river it was thrown into a flat-boat and transported to the portage. This incident was related to me by one who witnessed it, as an illustration of the energy and resourcefulness of Agoston Haraszthy.

Charles Naffz told of Haraszthy's operations in growing swine. He claimed a large piece of marsh land across the river from the village, from which he cut hay for his stock. On this he kept his hogs, and as the weather grew cold with the approach of winter, the porkers burrowed under the haystacks for protection. One day Haraszthy asked Mr. Naffz to go with him to help catch and slaughter a pig. They crossed the river to the marsh, and as they approached the pigs took to shelter. Haraszthy, with a mighty shout, dove into a hole in a haystack and backed out, pulling a young swine by the hind legs they dispatched him with a hunting knife, and then Haraszthy said to Mr. Naffz: "Now, Charley, for your pig!" And with a shout he dove into another hole in the haystack and pulled forth another hog. Mr. Naffz related that when they got back to the village with their game, they singed it, as there was then no other provision for scalding and dressing.

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One of the last of Haraszthy's farming schemes was that of sheep raising. He had at one time nearly 2,000 head of these animals, and engaged to tend them a young Swiss, Edward Guesser. By accident the shepherd set fire to the prairie grass, killing many sheep and causing a mighty fire. He ran away and hid in the bluffs until the next day. Guesser afterwards became a leading lawyer in Columbus, Ohio. When Haraszthy prepared to leave Wisconsin in the winter of 1848, he sold the remnant of his flock of sheep, about 500, to Charles Naffz and his brother-in-law, Charles Duerr, then but recently arrived from Germany. These gentlemen leased 320 acres of land, also claimed by Haraszthy, on which to herd and feed their flock.

During the year 1844: Sauk County was cut off from Dane and organized. Haraszthy, the village, was "boomed" for the county seat, and the citizens offered the Haraszthy and Bryant store building, estimated to be worth \$3,000, for a court house. But Prairie du Sac temporarily won the location. The next year it was proposed to move the seat of government, and Baraboo became a competitor, Citizens of Haraszthy, chagrined that their near neighbor had beaten them in the first contest, turned their support to Baraboo. Many meetings were held in the various settlements in the county; Haraszthy was one of the most zealous advocates of the change, and appeared at all the public demonstrations urging the claims of the new town for the honor. Finally a committee was appointed to investigate the wilderness in the west and central portions of the county, to see if it possessed resources that would support a reasonably dense population, for the people of Prairie du Sac were industriously circulating the report that the unsettled part of the new bailiwick was a rocky waste, and that Baraboo could not become a center of population. Agoston Haraszthy and Edmond Rendtorff, from Haraszthy; Levi Moore, Abraham Wood, Thomas Remington, and William H. Canfield, from Baraboo, as such committee set off to

explore the unknown regions of Sauk County.²⁵ They were away on this expedition several days, and suffered greatly from hunger because of the uncertainty of their rifles. Two days and a half they had only one partridge, the victim of Haraszthy's gun. But their report settled the controversy and Baraboo became the county seat. Soon after this, Haraszthy opened a store in the new capital as already related.

25 Sketches of Sauk County, v, p. 18.

The fireside tales concerning Haraszthy that are rapidly approaching the delightful stage of uncertainty that makes folklore, deal almost entirely with him as a hunter and with his picturesque characteristics. One who saw him but once, and then on a hunting expedition, describes him as wearing a green silk hunting shirt with a wide silken sash of flaming red. Thus accounted, he walked or rode through brush and bramble, disdainful of the wear and tear of his expensive dress. Others who knew him say this is a true and characteristic incident, and not at all unusual. Edmond Rendtorff has left an extended account of an eight days' hunting trip in which he accompanied Haraszthy, particularly notable for their being lost in forest, bemired in marshes, empty of stomach and flood bound by swollen streams. He closes: "Our German settlers glared and stared at us. I believe they could not make out whether we came direct out of hell, or from the moon. In fact, we looked worse than any European beggars, Winnebago's, or chimney sweeps." He says they were torn and dirty, having been in the woods through several heavy rain storms without any sort of shelter.²⁶

John C. Hawley describes the personal appearance of our adventurer as that of a man about six feet in height, very dark, with black hair and eyes. According to Hawley he invariably wore a "stovepipe" hat and carried a cane. Hon. Edwin C. Perkins of Prairie du Sac, who as a boy saw Haraszthy many times, and attended the

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public schools in the summers of 1847 and 1848 with Gaza and Attila F. Haraszthy, says that the first time he saw the Hungarian his boyish memory was impressed with the fierce black mustache that adorned his upper lip. The late Satterlee Clark records: "He was a nobleman in every sense, and he and his wife were among the most refined people I ever knew; and both were exceedingly good looking. I saw them both frequently, both at home and at Madison."²⁷ The veteran historian of Sauk County, William H. Canfield, tells a characteristic incident illustrative of the mercurial temperament of the fiery Hun. It seems that Mr. Canfield was in Sauk City (then the village of Haraszthy), and Haraszthy took him to the stable to show his horse stock. Haraszthy kept a saddle mare, a fine beast of which he was fond, and on the night before this visit a work horse had gotten loose and kicked the mare, leaving a vicious wound. Every time Haraszthy came near the offender he hit him a cut with his walking stick, saying: "You damned Cod, your no gentleman; to kick a lady!" This he repeated several times, administering physical rebuke with his cane with each remark.

26 Id., ii.

27 Wis. Hist. colls., viii, p. 321.

Charles Naffz tells of a patriotic celebration held in Agoston Haraszthy's house in the fall of 1848, in sympathy with the revolutionary movement in Hungary led by Louis Kossuth. Speeches were made in English by several present, but Haraszthy became so impassioned and enthusiastic that he lost control of his adopted tongue and had to talk in his native Hungarian. Toasts were drunk, a spread furnished, and a real jollification, of the hearty, frontier variety, was had.

Christmas day, 1848, Agoston Haraszthy, his wife, their six children, Gaza, Attila F., Arpad, Bela, Johanna, and Ida, with the father,

Charles Haraszthy and wife, bade farewell forever to the village of Haraszthy. Charles Naffz and Charles Duerr, with two sleighs, drove them to Madison where they made preparations for the overland trip to California. They started with the opening of spring and were a considerable caravan, including Thomas W. Sutherland, sometime United States district attorney for the Territory of Wisconsin.²⁸

In California Haraszthy landed at San Diego, then a frontier village. The following year (1860) San Diego County was organized and Agoston Haraszthy was made sheriff.²⁹ It is related, touching on his operations on the west coast, that he laid out a subdivision called "Middle San Diego," on land between the old village and the, then, new town.³⁰ In 1852, he was elected to the general assembly as a member of the lower house, and became an aggressive and working member from the organization of the session. He never returned to San Diego to live, but became interested in developing a piece of land as a farm in San Mateo County, a little south of San Francisco. How extensive his operations were in this venture, cannot now be ascertained. But he was appointed by President Franklin Pierce as assayer of the branch mint at San Francisco, and, later on, the responsibilities of smelter and refinery in the government works were his.

28 Menefee, Napa, Sonoma, etc., pp. 287-290.

29 Walter G. Smith, Story of San Diego (San Francisco, 1892). p. 100.

30 Menefee, Napa, Sonoma, etc., p. 288.

From these positions he resigned, under charges.³¹ There is a rumor at Sauk City that he swept the roof, window ledges, and other places of lodgment about the mint and obtained quantities of gold that otherwise would have been wasted. The charges, however, were thoroughly investigated, and he was fully cleared of criminal intent or action. It is said that during his incumbency he made many improvements in the methods of handling

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precious metals in the processes of smelting and refining. After his resignation from the government service he built in San Francisco metallurgical or smelting works.

In the year 1856 he removed his family and activities to Sonoma, and began developing a theory he had for some time advocated — the growing of grapes on land not artificially watered. He planted a large vineyard near the village of Sonoma, and called it Buena Vista. Here he built a fine residence, whose picture appears in his book on Grape Culture, Wines and Wine-Making.³² As a pioneer in what is known as dry culture for grapes, a system that greatly improved the quality of the fruit; he is mentioned by Bancroft as the father of viticulture in California. It is said that he was the first to employ Chinese labor on the farms of his adopted State. In 1861 he was appointed by the governor as one of three commissioners to investigate grape culture and report to the legislature. To him was assigned the task of making a thorough study of the industry in Europe. He was several months on the continent, and visited England, Holland, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, engaging more than three hundred varieties

of grape-vines for importation. These were shipped to California, and from this impetus the industry was first placed on a solid and business like basis. It is recorded that after his return from this trip he was made president of the State Agricultural Society, but this has not been verified.

31 Ibid, p. 289; H. H. Bancroft, California Inter Pocula (San Francisco, 1888), p. 342.

32 This book was printed (1862) by Harper Brothers, New York, at the expense of the State of California. Wisconsin Historical Society.

In 1863 he organized the Buena Vista Viniculture Society and conveyed to it his vineyards near Sonoma, comprising about 400 acres, then the largest in California.³³

33 Menefee, Napa, Sonoma, etc., p. 290.

About the year 1868 he transferred the field of his activities to Nicaragua, where it is said he became interested in a successful filibustering expedition. He was granted extensive concessions in the vicinity of Corinto and began an elaborate system of development. On July 6, 1869, he disappeared mysteriously, but from accounts that came back to California there seems to be no doubt but that he died from drowning in a swollen stream that he attempted to cross. There was no bridge, but the impetuous, fearless Hun was not daunted. He would swing across on a spreading limb! The brave heart that never had lost a beat in the face of defeat or disaster went down, the victim of its own fierce, unquiet courage. A paper reported that the party came to a bayou filled with crocodiles over which there was a small foot bridge. Haraszthy being in the advance attempted to cross the bridge, which gave way precipitating him into the water, and before he could be recovered by friends, a large crocodile caught him by the middle and carried him off, while a large number followed.³⁴ Withal, Agoston Haraszthy was a man of unbounded impulses, and all were good; generous, magnanimous, hospitable to his own material undoing, a true friend, a true patriot. His work in putting California on a safe basis in viticulture has been of incalculable worth to the State and country, yet it profited him not a cent. Wherever his restless activities led, he did for those about him, for humanity and the world, not for himself. He possessed one of those rare spirits that did things for the love of doing, never counting the cost nor the personal advantage. Those who knew him, loved and admired; many still living regret that the element of aggrandizement perhaps of greed — was wholly wanting in his great heart.

His devoted wife, who had followed patiently the meteoric

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career of her brilliant husband, survived his tragic death only a few months. Gaza, the eldest son, died in Corinto, December 19, 1878. Arpad, for many years a wholesale wine merchant in San Francisco, fell on the streets of that city from a stroke of apoplexy on the fifteenth day of November, 1900, and died before relief reached him. At last account, Bela was a citizen Kome City, Alaska. Attila, who was associated with Arpad in San Francisco, has dropped out of sight and record. The father, Charles Haraszthy,³⁴ died on shipboard, between Nicaragua and San Francisco, about the time of the death of his son, and was buried at sea.

34 Wisconsin Historical Collections – Draper. Vol. VIII

Charles Halasz, the cousin and companion of Agoston Haraszthy in his immigration into Wisconsin, lived a highly respected citizen in Sauk City for many years. For several terms he was a justice of the peace, was first president of the Old Settlers' Association, and died during the seventies. In commercial life he was a lumber merchant. As a boy he gave promise of character of unusual strength and vigor, which his mature years fully justified.

Note: The early records, as well as the signatures to documents that survived, show a variety of spelling of the surname. The first deeds signed by both Charles and Agoston give the spelling as Harasthys; again, it is Haraszthsrz. A lease, now in the collection of the Sauk County Historical Society at Baraboo, executed in the fall of 1848, is signed Harasthy. All these seemed to show a process of evolution, which culminated in Haraszthy, in the book on viticulture published by the State of California. It is the spelling used by the son, Arpad, in his contributions to periodical literature, and in his business as a wine merchant in San Francisco. Because of the permanent character thus given to this spelling, it has been adopted in the present paper.

An article in Volume VIII of the *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* dated 1908 and written by Satterlee Clark reads as follows:

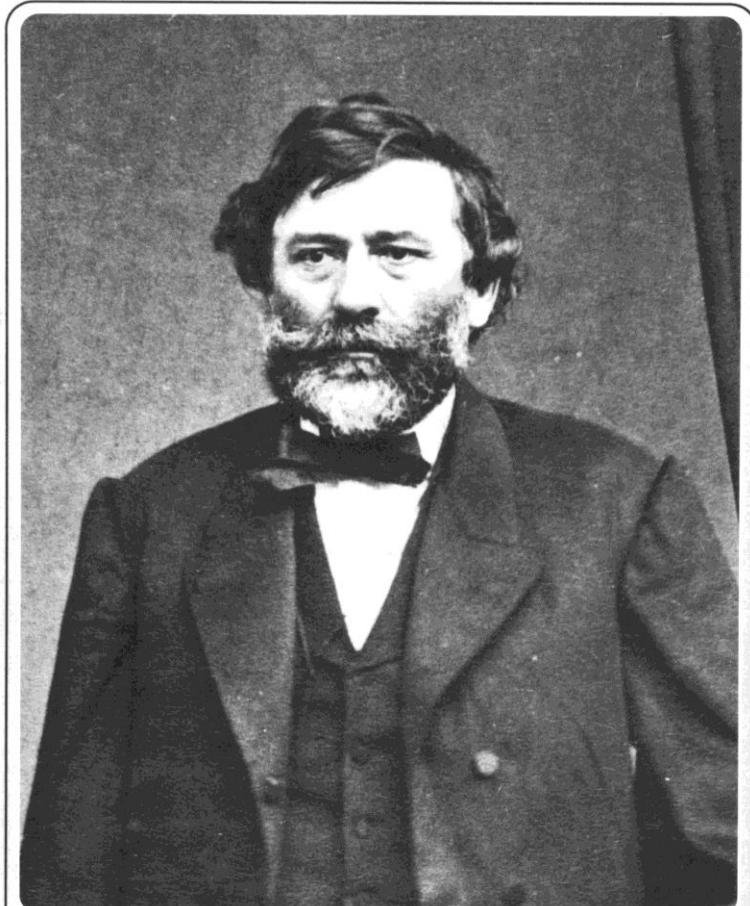
"I must say something about Count Haraszthy and his family. In about 1842 or 1843, I am not certain which, Count Agostin Haraszthy came to Wisconsin, bought some property at Sauk City on the Wisconsin, and settled there with his family. He was a nobleman in every sense, and he and his wife were among the most refined people I ever knew; and both were exceedingly good looking.

I saw them frequently both at home and at Madison. At the latter place they had a large number of friends and acquaintances, by whom they were much respected. Early in the spring of 1849 he joined a party that left Madison to go overland to California. Among those who went with him was the Hon. Thomas W. Sutherland, who had formerly been United States District Attorney of the Territory. Haraszthy was quite successful in raising grapes and in the manufacture of wine and distilled spirits. Within two or three years last passed, I read in some paper a thrilling account of his death. It seemed he had procured the exclusive privilege of manufacturing distilled spirits in Central America; that he went with a small party in search of a good locality for raising grapes and establishing a distillery; and that party came to a bayou filled with crocodiles over which there was a small foot bridge. Haraszthy being in the advance attempted to cross the bridge, which gave way precipitating him into the water, and before he could be recovered by his friends, a large crocodile caught him by the middle and carried him off, while a large number followed. His fate can well be imagined."

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The first store on the Baraboo rapids was kept near the future site of the Maxwell dam by **Augustine Haraszthy** and **J. C. Grapel**, near the **Peck house**. It is not clear where the Peck house was located but another description of the site of Haraszthy's Store places it at the foot of **Potter's Path**, also known as **Potter's lane**, now known as **Potter Street**. This store building was the first frame building in the Baraboo valley and was constructed in 1845. It was later discovered by the Maxwell's that the Haraszthy's Store was on their claim. [There is more information on Count Augsteen Haraszthy in Baraboo Wisconsin 1850-2010..Volume II..Trivia section IV.](#)



The Count

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Eleonora Dedinszky, Wife of Agoston Harszthy

