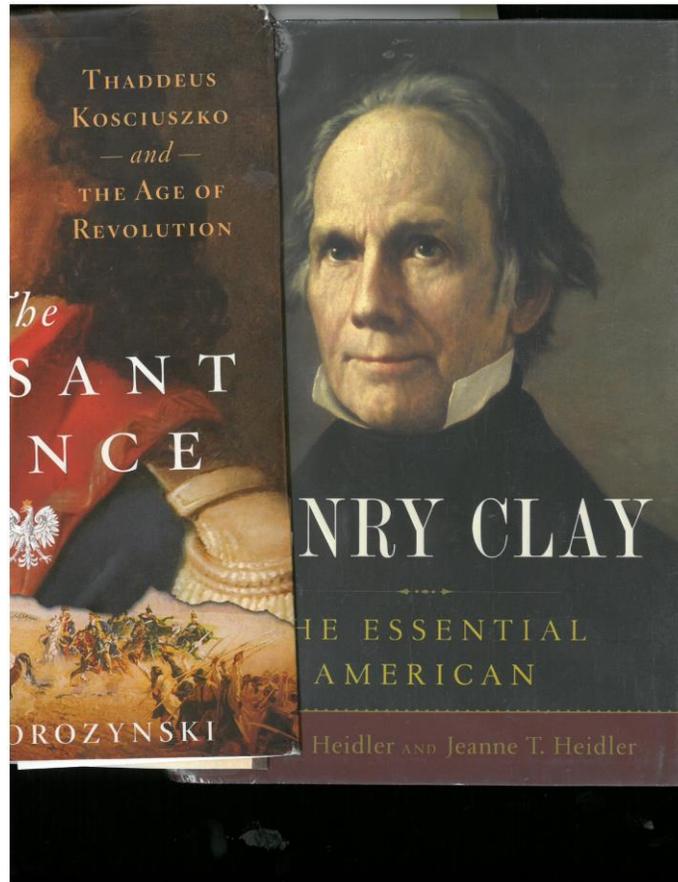


2014 Honorable Mention
Estelle Wachtel-Torres, M.D. Literary Competition

Clay, Kosciuszko & '97 Commonalities
By Leonard T. Zabawski



April 12 in 1777, over 237 years ago marked the birth of Henry Clay, later to become known as the “Great Compromiser”. Clay was a co-founder of the US Whig party. He served as both U.S. Senator & Representative. The “essential American”¹ was born in Hanover County, Virginia, near Richmond. One day after Clay’s birth on 13 April, General Alexander McDougall, appointed by Commander-in-Chief George

Washington to complete the fort at West Point, wrote to Commander Washington in favor of the 31-year old Tadeusz “Thaddeus” Kosciuszko² as a superior engineer for whom McDougall’s men preferred to work with as the Americans fought the British in the American Revolutionary War. While Storozynski pointed out the letter in studying the life of the Polish-born freedom fighter who labored on both sides of the Atlantic, he never compared it to Clay’s birth; nor has anyone compared the careers of both men and their commonalities, as both became Republicans and emancipators of their times, at least in 1797-98.

The Americans won their war for independence via treaty from the British in 1782, after the Yorktown battle settled the score on 19 October, 1781. After the victory and celebrations ceased the new country went on to forge its own destiny.

Eventually happy days would end. The United States was unified v. the colonizer of the Crown and loyalists who could depart went to Canada, England or wherever. First President Washington was part of no political party and so unity continued. An inevitable faction then emerged in the political life of the young country by 1792, after the common enemy of Britain was checked in the American Revolution & remained somewhat off-stage until 1812.

¹ David S. Heidler & Jeanne T. Heidler, Henry Clay: The Essential American, New York: Random House, 2010, pp.26-36. A major portion of this essay was informed by Heidler & Heidler except where noted.

² Alex Storozynski, The Peasant Prince: Thaddeus Kosciuszko & the Age of Revolution, New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2009, pp. 55-57. A major portion of this essay is also informed by Storozynski except where noted.

Kosciuszko left to return to Europe on July 15, 1784. He thus missed the dawning of the so-called “first party system”³ years beginning in 1792 in the States while he was back in Europe fighting less successfully for Polish-Lithuanian freedom v. the partitioning powers of Russia, Austria & Prussia. Following the second Partition of Poland-Lithuania, Kosciuszko read out the Act of Insurrection in the market square of Krakow on 24 March 1794 after returning from exile in the US, “for national self-rule... and for the general liberty”.⁴ A victory in Raclawice on 4 April 1794 was won by the Polish insurgents made up of peasant scythemen v. a professional Russian army. But the peasants under Kosciuszko lost the battle and the war at Maciejowice on 10 October 1794. Kosciuszko almost died. It seemed that he had a knack for going from the frying pan to the fire.

After defeat and near-death on the battlefield, and imprisonment at the hands of Russia, Kosciuszko returned to Philadelphia in the summer of 1797 moving slowly with his war wounds. He had been out from the States for 13 years. He was not used to the 1792 faction.

The Federalists of Alexander Hamilton favored a strong central government and tended to side with Anglophiles, holding up England as the

³ Another segment of this essay informing the author derives from Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Party_System

⁴ Another informant is Norman Davies, Europe: A History. 1996. Oxford Pres, pp. 721-722.

political model to emulate. The Republicans of Thomas Jefferson favored decentralized states' rights and tended to side with Francophiles, citing decentralized France as the preferred governing model.

Kosciuszko, 51, and new to this US fractionalization after the absence of over a dozen years, returned to side with the division of his known ally: Jefferson. Viewing the Federalists as elitist and aristocratic, Kosciuszko refused to meet with the new Federalist President John Adams, who had requested an audience. Rather Kosciuszko sent as his emissary, Julian Urstyn Niemcewicz. Had Kosciuszko banked on modern US currency he would have spent a ten dollar bill [\$10.00 = Hamilton] but gained a two dollar bill [\$2.00 = Jefferson], for a net loss of eight (8) bucks.

Meanwhile, Henry Clay was now twenty years old, having moved to Kentucky soon after it had become the 15th state on 1 June 1792, formed from what was Virginia. Clay⁵ began his legal career in the prosperous town of Lexington after having passed the bar in both Virginia & Kentucky. He soon became well-known for his successful defense in several murder trials. But what is remarkable is that both "young-Counselor Clay" & "long-in-the tooth

⁵ Yet a fifth segment of this essay informing the author derives from Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Clay

Kosciusko", from Lexington to Philadelphia, over 400 miles apart by road, shared two major political commonalities.

Both Clay & Kosciuszko were more allied with the Republican fraction of Jefferson, which should come as little surprise. Kentucky was a Jeffersonian republic, with many French influences [Louisville is named after the French King Louis XVI, whom Jefferson knew as Ambassador to France; Louisville is located in Jefferson County, the largest county in Kentucky⁶]. Clay & his fellow Kentuckians had little need for policies of Hamilton, not dissimilar to Kosciuszko, as demonstrated.

What is perhaps more surprising is that both Clay & Kosciuszko in 1797-78 were opposed to slavery. Since Kentucky had relatively few slaves, Clay had calculated that the gradual abolishment of slavery would not create severe economic hardship. He wrote under the pen-name, *Scaevola*, a republican of ancient Rome, advocating for the gradual abolition of slavery in Kentucky, published in John Bradford's Kentucky Gazette. While not considered a great emancipator, in contradiction to his personal choices [Charlotte Dupuy's 1829 freedom suit against Henry Clay was the only reason she was released from him, a legal challenge to slavery which preceded the more famous Dred Scott case by

⁶Another sextet of this essay is informed by Michael Barone, editor, Almanac of American Politics, National Journal, 2008-12 editions.

17 years], Clay's efforts in 1797-78 are to be commended for their potentially progressive stance.

More strongly, Kosciuszko practiced his abolitionist beliefs of freedom for both European serfs as well as American slaves in both his public and personal spheres. At the end of the winter of 1797-98, he had Thomas Jefferson draw up his estate with his order to buy freedom for slaves, including Jefferson's. Jefferson tended to neglect parts of his friend's order. But he was at least pressured to consider Kosciuszko's [& Clay's] '97-98 wishes to abolish slavery, which preceded the 13th amendment by "great compromises", civil war and 67 years of tensions.

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Illustration: Clay, Kosciuszko & '97 Commonalities

KOSCIUSZKO & CLAY

- Thaddeus Kosciuszko, painted by Josef Grassi. Courtesy of the Polish Embassy in Washington, D.C.; Detail from the Raclawice Panorama courtesy of Raclawice Panorama Museum in Wroclaw, Poland. From Alex Storozynski, The Peasant Prince: Thaddeus Kosciuszko & the Age of Revolution, New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2009,
- Henry Clay, designed by Matthew Enderlin, painted by Henry Darby. Courtesy of the US Senate collection. From David S. Heidler & Jeanne T. Heidler, Henry Clay: The Essential American, New York: Random House, 2010,