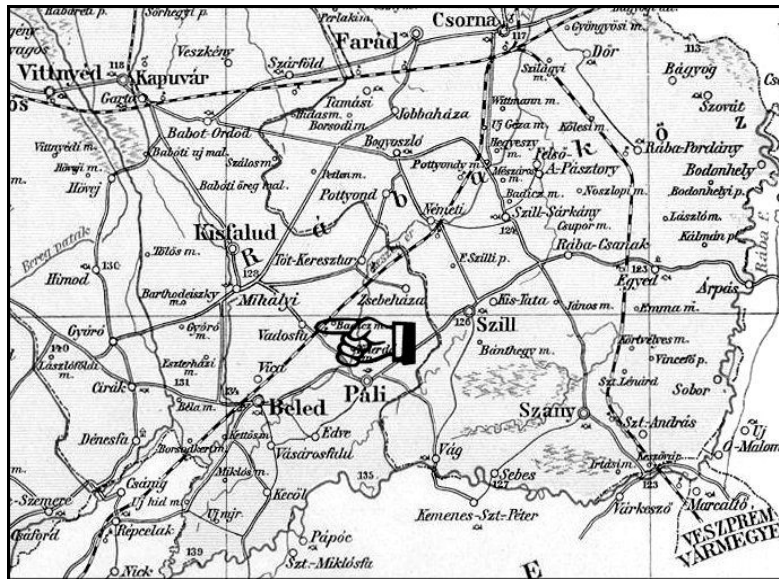


The Village of Vadosfa and our Fekete Ancestors



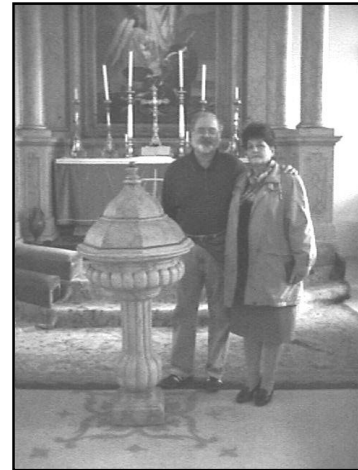
The Village of Vadosfa and Why It's Important. Vadosfa is a tiny village in the southern part of historic Sopron County known as the Rábaköz (land around the Rába river). It is the smallest recognized settlement of the county, with a recent population of only 94. Vadosfa is an old village, being first mentioned in the literature in 1227. The 1914 map above will give you an idea of its location and relationship to neighboring towns and villages. Despite its small size, over the last three centuries Vadosfa played a major role in the history of Hungarian Protestantism, and in the history of our family. Two lines of our ancestry – the Fekete's and the Székely's lived in Vadosfa during the critical 18th century.

At the time of the Reformation, Protestantism took hold very rapidly in Hungary. By the 1590s, Hungary was essentially 100% Protestant – Evangelical (Lutheran) and Reformed. The Roman Catholic counter-reformation of the 17th century made significant inroads back toward Catholicism, especially among the aristocracy. But, the Habsburg attempt at complete suppression of the Protestants in the 1670's failed, although for a few years the only functioning Lutheran church in western Hungary was in Sopron. At the *Diet of Sopron* of 1681, the Habsburg king guaranteed freedom of religion for Hungary and gave assurances that a Lutheran and a Reformed church would be tolerated in each county seat. The *Explanatio Leopoldina* (King Leopold's Explanation) of 1691 further clarified the religious situation. In this decree, the king specified that family worship in the privacy of one's home was to be totally unrestricted. But, he identified only two towns in each of the eleven counties in northwestern Hungary (the part of the nation that weren't under Turkish occupation) where Protestant churches would be tolerated. Furthermore, the pastors there were not permitted to preach or administer sacraments outside of their respective towns. Each congregation must come to the pastor for public worship, marriages and baptisms. And, if they came from neighboring towns, their local Catholic priest was still due the fees for the rites he didn't perform! Strict enforcement of these restrictions on religious practice evolved slowly, over the quarter century following Leopold's compromise with the Protestants. For instance, the Lutheran church in Beled, the town that housed the largest concentration of Lutherans (and our ancestors) in the Rábaköz, was not taken over by the Catholics until 1716.

Vadosfa gained its importance because it was one of the two villages in Sopron County that were permitted to retain its Lutheran Church. Our Hungarian Lutheran ancestors lived in Sopron and Vas counties. The four designated places for Lutheran churches were Vadosfa and Nemeskér in Sopron County and Nemesdömölk and Nemescsó in Vas County. All but the last of these villages play an important role in our family history. In the Habsburg efforts to constrain Protestantism, Vadosfa was probably selected due to its small size and out-of-the-way location. But as a result, it became the focal point of Lutheranism in that area during the entire 18th century. It was the only authorized Lutheran church serving 30-35 nearby villages and towns with predominantly Lutheran populations.

The History of the Lutheran Congregation at Vadosfa. There is evidence that the Lutheran congregation in Vadosfa came into existence about 1644 as an off-shoot of the congregation in Mihályi with which it shared a pastor (this was also the case with the congregation in Kisfalud). These affiliated congregations became independent in 1665. Nothing is known of where the congregation met initially – perhaps in the manor house of a Lutheran nobleman named János Radó who was prominent in the early years of the congregation. His family arms were displayed in the first church building, which according to Payr’s book **The History of the Trans-Danubian Evangelical Church** was probably constructed in 1719.

The early Lutheran pastors of Vadosfa were: Ádám Varju; Mihály Áts; Ádám Jugovits; and Ferenc Büki. Vadosfa’s first actual church building lasted only a short time – 10 to 15 years we were told. The only remnant of that building to survive is the stone baptismal font pictured here. The photo was taken in 1998 with my cousin Cecilia and I beside the font where many of our ancestors were baptized. The font is believed to date from 1725.



The first pastor to serve Vadosfa that we know much about was Dr. Márton Vázsonyi. He was born in Nagyvázsony, Veszprém megye, in 1688. In 1709 he began his studies at the University of Halle in Germany, the center of Lutheran *Pietism*. [Pietism was a “back to basics” movement in the Lutheran church that was begun by Philipp Jakob Spener at Halle in the late 17th century.] Vázsonyi returned to Hungary in 1712, first to Egyed and later he was rector of the Lutheran school in Győr. He came to Vadosfa as its pastor in 1724. It was during his tenure there that the next church building was dedicated on Saint Martin’s Day of 1734, according to his notes that I found in the Vadosfa church registers. Pastor Vázsonyi, who was considered a leader of the Pietist movement in Trans-Danubia, died in Vadosfa on 28 Apr 1737.

During the first four decades of the 18th century, the town’s population grew. It was becoming a refuge for committed Lutherans – especially after King Charles III’s *Carolina Resolutio* of 1731 and 1734 inaugurated several decades of extreme suppression of Protestantism. This was basically in the form of a crackdown on the many towns that continued to maintain unauthorized Lutheran churches and schools. Pressure was even put on the pastors in places such as Vadosfa where Lutheranism was expressly permitted. Throughout most of Hungary during the next fifty years, the Protestant churches essentially went underground – except for a few *hotbeds of heresy* -- one such place was Vadosfa.

Bishop Fábri and the Vadosfa Riot. Dr. Gergely Fábri succeeded Vázsonyi on 25 May 1737 as *rector* of the *gimnazium* (high school) and *VDM* (Minister of the Word of God) at the Evangelical Lutheran church in Vadosfa. But, as we shall see, the last years of Fabri’s tenure were a most difficult time for Vadosfa. Fábri was born in 1707, and was educated at Wittenberg

University in Germany. He also advocated the Pietist approach to Lutheranism, with its emphasis on the “priesthood of all believers.” He strongly objected to the forced conversion of the Lutheran congregation in Himód in 1747 and gave refuge to many residents of that village in Vadosfa. This resulted in slanderous accusations against him, according to the article *The History of the Evangelical Church in Vadosfa* in the July 2001 issue of the online magazine **Honismeret**. Marczali, in **Hungary in the 18th Century**, further points out that:

The sphere of authority of the Hungarian [Roman Catholic] prelates was increased to a considerable extent by the fact that they enjoyed the right of holding visitations of the Protestants. It was in reality this right that secured their Church recognition as the predominant religion. As the outward expression of this right of theirs and of their dignity, the bishops’ visitations were carried out with the greatest pomp and splendour. The bells pealed, and the minister and the officials awaited the arrival of the distinguished guest at some distance from the entrance to each village. The authorities competed with one another in the magnificence of their reception; young nobles, both Protestant and Catholic, rode out to meet the bishop and accompanied him on horseback to the next parish. If his journey took the bishop to more than one county, a hundred horsemen would often await his arrival on the confines of each one.

On 26 June 1748, Fábri was visited by just such a delegation, for an “ecclesiastical examination.” Such examinations were common from the mid-1740s and often led to the expulsion of the pastor, or even the seizure and closing of a church, if the pastor did not acquit himself well in the questioning. The key theological issue often was the Protestant pastor’s understanding of the doctrine of baptism. This topic particularly did not bode well for Reformed pastors, but the Lutheran teaching was much closer to the Catholic doctrine. Pastor Fábri described his interrogation, in Latin by his own hand, in the baptismal register of his church.

It was quite a delegation that came to Vadosfa for the inquiry in 1748. Count Francis Zichy (an immensely wealthy aristocrat) who was the Roman Catholic Bishop of Győr, led the visitation. In Győr County, the bishop was also *főispán* – the royal governor of the county -- adding to his dignity. Since Vadosfa was in adjacent Sopron County, in all probability many Sopron County officials met the bishop at the county line to accompany him on his visitation, as described by Marczali.

Zichy’s delegation itself included several Jesuit priests (who did the actual questioning), the clerks and secretaries necessary to record the proceedings, and a military contingent to ensure the safety of the delegation. As expected, most of the questions that Fábri documented concerned the sacrament of baptism. He notes that if his answers are faulty the committee will recommend his dismissal to the monarch. Apparently, he was able to answer to the satisfaction of all those present, since he was not removed from his post ... yet!

In 1750 Fábri was appointed Superintendent and Bishop of the Trans-Danubian Evangelical Church, according to Payr. He was now leader of all Lutherans south and west of the Danube River – essentially the entire western half of present-day Hungary. This obviously made his *seat* – the village of Vadosfa, with its population of less than 500 – a target of the Jesuit priests who were leading the efforts to suppress the “heretics.” That brings us to the *Vadosfa Riot* that took place on Saint Stephen’s Day (August 20) of 1751.

I will recount this story in the words of the 1854 book **History of the Protestant Church in Hungary** by Pastor János Bauhofer of Buda. While it tends to have a strong anti-Catholic bias, it was published in English and doesn’t require my limited translation skills.

The affair of Vadosfa was, however, one of the heaviest trials for the Protestants. The number of them residing at this place had increased greatly within a few years, in consequence of persecutions in other parts having driven them away. With the exception of a few noblemen, nearly all the residents were Protestant. The distinguished superintendent Fábri was laboring here, when it occurred to a Roman Catholic landowner, Balázs Kisfaludi, to build a chapel on a spot of

ground which was [near the Lutheran church]. The Roman Catholic chapel was to be consecrated on St. Stephen's day.

... a report was spread that, on the same day, the [Roman Catholic] Bishop of [Győr] intended forcibly seizing the Protestant house of worship [in Vadosfa]. He had of late been very diligent in this part of his calling, and there was some reason to fear that the report might prove true. [n.b. He took over the large Lutheran church in the city of Győr in 1749.] Some of the [Protestant] nobility wrote ... to friends in Rábaköz and on the appointed day they came by thousands, armed, and prepared to defend the church if the Bishop [of Győr] should attempt to take possession.

The day arrived, and crowds of [Catholic] pilgrims came to attend the consecration of the chapel. But the Protestants, fearing for their own interests, closed up the roads, refused to admit the pilgrims, and ... as neither side would yield, there was a considerable riot, and the pilgrims were driven away.

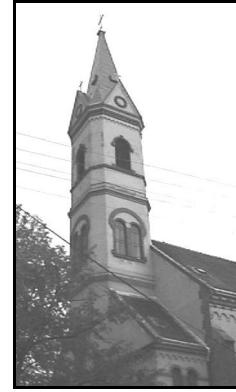
Fifty-four of the Protestants, some of whom were women, were imprisoned in the castle of Kapuvár for [up to] a year and seven months, and then dismissed, some with one hundred and fifty lashes, some with one hundred, and some with fifty. ... One nobleman was thrown for a year into prison, and the remainder who were involved were fined three thousand florins, and with this money a Roman Catholic church was built.

The superintendent was thrown into a distant prison, deprived of his office, both as superintendent and pastor; and it was decreed that, in all time coming, the Protestant church of Vadosfa should remain closed every year on the 20th of August.

One Catholic man had died in the rioting, and the news of the fighting quickly spread throughout the country. Therefore, the government felt it had to take some action. Pastor Fábri, though he had tried to contain the fighting, was immediately imprisoned at the castle at Nezsider, Moson County. In January of 1752, according to Payr, he was tried before county authorities and sentenced to six months in prison at Nemetkeresztúr, south of Sopron. Upon his release from prison, he was stripped of his position as Superintendent of the Trans-Danubian Evangelical Church and 8 March 1753 was exiled from Vadosfa. He later served as pastor in Nemescsó and then as director of the large Lutheran high school in the city of Eperjes. In his later years, Fábri wrote extensively on the restructuring of the Hungarian secondary education system. He died in 1779. The last punishment mentioned by Bauhofer – the closing of the Vadosfa church on Saint Stephen's Day -- remained in force until 1830. You'll read more of the aftermath of the riot below, when we write about our Fekete ancestors.

Later History of the Vadosfa Lutheran Church. Márton Kutsera, who previously served as pastor at Nemesdömölk [where he baptized several of our *Berecz* and other ancestors] took over the pastorate in Vadosfa on 24 May 1753 after the pulpit was officially declared vacant on 13 April. [He now had the opportunity to baptize many of our *Mátis*, *Fekete*, etc. ancestors.] Among his duties, as was the case for every pastor, he maintained the parish registers, some of which shed light on a somewhat sordid part of our family history. Kutsera served in Vadosfa for 33 years, during which King Joseph II issued his 1781 *Edict of Toleration* guaranteeing Protestants much greater freedoms throughout the Kingdom of Hungary

. Capping Rev. Kutsera's long service, in 1786 a new bell tower was added to the church in Vadosfa. At the same time an organ was installed. He mentions these additions in notes in the church registers. That old organ was subsequently moved from church-to-church and continues in use in the current edifice, still operated by manual bellows. It was our pleasure in 1998 to hear Pastor Rác play that organ while József Szalay (my cousin Cecilia's husband and later mayor of Beled) struggled pumping the bellows to maintain sufficient air pressure for the music. Below are photos of Pastor Rác at the Vadosfa organ console, the organ pipes, and the exterior of the present Vadosfa Lutheran church built in 1912.



1998 Photos of the Lutheran Church in Vadosfa.

The baroque church of 1734 had been built over a crypt where the noble families of Vadosfa, such as our *Székely* ancestors, were buried. The other local parishioners, for instance our *Fekete* ancestors, were buried in the churchyard. Congregants from other towns – such as Beled where our *Mátis* and other ancestors lived -- were buried in their local cemeteries either by the Catholic priest or without the benefit of clergy. The 1734 church lasted until 1857 when a very large church was built in its place. The 1857 building had major structural problems; Pastor Rác told us that the balconies even collapsed! It was intentionally razed in 1912 by a fire that could be seen for 100 kilometers. Then it was replaced by the current neo-Romanesque structure. Artifacts from the early crypts are displayed in the present-day church.

Our Fekete Ancestors in Vadosfa. Now, let me tell you a little about the relationship of our family to the above general history. One of my 5th-great-grandfathers, who lived in Vadosfa at the time, was named Péter Fekete. He was the son of János Fekete, the long-time pastor of the Lutheran church in Csikvánd, Győr county, and almost certainly the grandson of György Fekete, Lutheran pastor at Magyargencs, Vas county, from 1674 until 1695. They all sometimes used the Latinized version of their family name – Nigrini – which was an affectation common to Lutheran clergymen of the era. Peter, though, was not a pastor. He was a respected Lutheran layman who owned the local barbershop in Vadosfa. At the time, the barbering profession was important not only because of the need for haircuts and shaves ... the barber was also the local surgeon. In a small town like Vadosfa, he was probably, with the local midwife, the only “medical professional” available.

Péter Fekete married Rozina Németh, the daughter of a Vadosfa nobleman, about 1740 and established his business in the rapidly expanding village. They had eleven children, of whom six or seven survived to adulthood (*par for the course* in this era). We don't have complete records on the family because parts of the church registers are missing between 1748 and 1753 – for obvious reasons. But, the family seems to have been *pillars* of the local Lutheran community ... until the riot of 1751.

We do not know for certain what role Péter and Rozina played in the riots of 1751. But, from the evidence available, it is obvious that at least Peter was deeply involved. I have been unable to find a list of the 54 Lutheran parishioners who were imprisoned following the riot, but other evidence makes it reasonably certain that Péter Fekete was among them. Note that it was about this time that Peter's father was ousted by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Győr from his 40-year pastorate in Csikvánd, a village south of the city of Győr. Peter's strong anti-Catholic actions may have resulted from his father's ouster, or more likely, his father's ouster may have resulted from the son's participation in the riot. Either way, it seems obvious the two facts are related. By

the way, the father – János Fekete aka Nigrini – continued to live in Csikvánd until his death on 04 March 1758, and even served as an interim pastor in a nearby village.

So, it seems Péter Fekete was imprisoned for more than a year, and was whipped prior to his release as described by Bauhofer. In Hungary at the time, whipping was a routine punishment for commoners (like Fekete), while noblemen who committed offenses could be thrown in prison and fined, but were immune from corporal punishment. In 1753, Fekete came home from prison a weakened and disheartened man, only to find that his wife was having an affair with one of the employees in his barbering business. He turned to drink, and for most of the rest of his life he was a very angry alcoholic. [Sh] It happens in the best of families! Apparently, in his last year, Péter Fekete suddenly had a change of heart and was again the pious, upstanding citizen of his earlier years. How, you ask, can I have such personal details of the happenings more than 250 years ago?

The answer is Pastor Kutsera told us all about it ... though in a somewhat cryptic way. Remember that Rev. Martón Kutsera in 1753 was installed as Lutheran pastor in Vadosfa after the Roman Catholic Bishop of Győr ousted Bishop Fábri, his predecessor. So it was incumbent on him to *toe-the-line* just to keep the church doors open. One of the unusual things he did was the way he kept the church registers. As was typical, the entries were in Hungarian (Magyar). But, he sometimes added notes in Latin ... probably so that the casual observer in the parish office would not be able to read them. Also, these notes were usually associated with the burial register, so he was not adverse to speaking ill of the dead ... and needless to say, they couldn't object!

The standard wording in Magyar, including the biblical text used at the burial, was entered into the 28 January 1757 burial record of Sándor Horváth alias *the barber*, who was an unmarried man who died at the age of 35 after an eight-week illness. Then in Latin the record reads on: "He lived an impure life with Rozina Németh, wife of Péter Fekete alias Nigrini ..." That's the evidence of an affair. Were there any children born of this affair? There was a son Imre Fekete, for whom there is no birth record, who died in 1756 with no age at death given. Based on the birth dates of the other children in the family, he was clearly born between 1749 and 1753 when the records were scanty. Which barber was his father? ... I guess we'll never know.

A few years later, in the burial record for Péter Nigrini ... after stating in Magyar that he died of tuberculosis on 22 July 1763 ,, Pastor Kutsera writes in Latin: "With utmost contempt for divine worship, for nine years he did not partake of the sacred supper of the Lord, but used dreadful language while indulging in drunkenness and anger. One year before his death, as if struck by lightening, he became like a lamb repudiating evil, and the mysteries of the Lord's Supper were useful as before."

Our ancestor Rozina Németh lived another three decades plus, and in her burial record of 15 May 1800 she is simply identified as the widow of Péter Fekete. No Latin notes were used in that record, for Pastor Kutsera was long gone. I'm sure her transgressions also were long-since forgotten.