The Village of Vadosfa and Why It’s Important. Vadosfa is a tiny village in the southern part of historic Sopron County known as Rábaköz. It is the smallest recognized settlement of the county, with a current population of only 94. Vadosfa is an old village, being first mentioned in the literature in 1227. The 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.

From 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 counter-reformation of the 17th century made significant inroads, especially among the aristocracy. But, the Habsburg attempt at complete suppression of the Protestants in the 1670’s failed. 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 ones home was to be totally unrestricted. But, he identified only two towns in each of the eleven counties in northwestern Hungary 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 “explanation.” 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. 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, possibly constructed in 1719.3

The early 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 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 1725.4

The first pastor to serve Vadosfa that we know much about was Dr. Martin 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.5 He 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 1724.6 It was during his tenure there that the next church building was dedicated on Saint Martin's Day of 1734.7 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. Gregory Fábri succeeded Vásnyi 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. The usual date given for Fabri’s birth (1718) is probably incorrect; perhaps it was 1708. Fábri 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.8 Marczali 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.\textsuperscript{9}

On 26 June 1748, Fábrí 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.\textsuperscript{10}

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 Fabri 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.\textsuperscript{11} 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 of Pastor János Bauhofer of Buda. While it tends to have a strong anti-Catholic bias, it was written 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, Balas, to build a chapel on a spot of ground which was disputed property between the members of the two confessions. The Roman Catholic chapel was to be consecrated on St. Stephen’s day.

… a report was spread that, on the same day, the Bishop of [Győr] intended forcibly seizing the Protestant house of worship. 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. Some of the resident 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 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 died in the rioting, and the news of the fighting quickly spread throughout the country. Therefore, the government had to take action. Pastor Fá bri, though he had tried to contain the fighting, was immediately imprisoned at the castle at Nezsider, Moson County. In January of 1752 he was tried before county authorities and sentenced to six months in prison at Németkeresztúr, 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 Nemescső and then as director of the large Lutheran high school in the city of Eperjes. 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.

**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.] Here he served for 33 years. Capping his long service, in 1786 a new bell tower was added to the church in Vadosfa. At the same time an organ was installed. 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 current 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.

The baroque church of 1754 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 great-great-great grandfathers, who lived in Vadosfa at the time, was named Peter Fekete. He was the son of John Fekete, the long-time pastor of the Lutheran church in Csikvánd, Györ county, and almost certainly the grandson of George Fekete, Lutheran pastor at Magyargencs, Vas county, from 1674 until 1695. They all sometimes used the Latinized version of their family name – Nigrini. 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, but the barber was also the local surgeon. In a small town like Vadosfa, he was probably the only ‘medical professional” available.

Peter Fekete married Rosa 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 of their births because extensive parts of the church registers are missing between 1748 and 1753 – for obvious reasons. The family seems to have been pillars of the local Lutheran community.

We do not know for certain what role Peter and Rosa played in the riots of 1751. But, from the evidence available, it is obvious that at least Peter was deeply involved. Note that it was about this time that Peter’s father was ousted from his 40-year pastorate in Csikvánd, a village south of Györ. Peter’s strong anti-Catholic actions may have resulted from his father’s ouster by the Bishop of Györ, or alternatively, 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.

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1 Gönczy, Pál; Sopron Vármegye Térképe (Sopron County Map) – scale 1:380,000; about 1914.
2 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 a role in our family history.
3 Payr, Sándor; A Dunátuli Evangélikus Egyhazkerület Története (The History of the Trans-Danubian Evangelical Church); Vol 1; 1924. Pages 92 and 332. [Hereafter: Payr, 1924.]
4 Györ-Moson-Sopron Megye website; Vadosfa page.
5 Pietism was a ‘back to basics” movement in the Lutheran church that was begun by Philipp Jakab Spener at Halle in the late 17th century.
6 Veszprém Megyei Életrajzi Lexikon (Veszpréim County Biographical Lexicon) website.
7 Anyakönyv (Church Register) of the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church at Vadosfa; 1707-1895. Vol. 2; Page 2. [Hereafter: Vadosfa Church Register.]
8 Németh and Borus; A vadosfai evangélikus templom története (The History of the Evangelical Church in Vadosfa) in Honismeret; online magazine of 29 July 2001. [Hereafter: Németh and Borus; 2001.]
10 Fábri, Gergely; in Vadosfa Church Register. Vol. 2; Page 28.
11 Payr, 1924. Pages 594.
13 Payr, 1924. Pages 566 and 166.
14 Vadosfa Church Register. Vol. 2; Page 2.