

My Trip to Eger, Hungary

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INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2001, I had the wonderful opportunity to visit my ancestral towns in Hungary: Eger, Gyongyos, Sajo-Kazincz, Dios Gyor and Budapest. During my weeklong stay, I visited several cemeteries, and as time allowed, photographed them as best that I could. In one case, due to the excellent negotiating skills of my guide and new friend Peter Winter (as well as shmearing the caretaker with some money), I had the good fortune to obtain and photograph the pages in the *Chevra Kaddisha*, the two interment books for the Jewish cemetery in Eger.

My sister and I have transcribed the information found and that information is available here at this web site. There are approximately 2,000 names in the Eger database. This information should be a great help to you when searching the JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR) which also has links to photographs of the *Chevra* (burial) book. The images have a lot of additional information that has not been transcribed, because my Hebrew reading abilities are limited, so if anyone is willing to help translate the Hebrew, please contact me by writing to jzeisler@email.com. Thank you in advance. Also, I've also transcribed the 280 names from the Auschwitz memorial in the Eger cemetery also found at this web site. I hope that this information is useful. Please let me know.

At the end of each day during my trip to Hungary, during the first week of April 2001 (usually around 1-2am), I wrote an email to the family back home; describing the day's events as best I could so that they could, sort of, come along with me. The email below describes the events on my trip from Budapest to Eger on April 1, 2001, and the story of what happened at the cemetery. I think that you'll enjoy it.

Some things that you should know:

1. I was searching for my C/zeisler family, especially Farkas Czeisler, my ggg-grandfather who died on 19 Feb, 1869.
2. I had a very good time in Hungary and was treated very well by everyone that I met - even though I may make fun of them from time to time in my stories.

The Story (Daily Report)

Cheers from the city of sunshine. Yep, this was the first day of my entire European trip (two weeks so far) that I can remember seeing the sun. It's about time. I even had a bit more sun shine upon me today. Not a lot, but a bit.

So now - Let's get ready to rrrummbllle with the days events.

Peter [Winter] and I picked up a rental car at 9am and we (I) drove to Eger, the land of my forefathers. The rental agent [in Budapest] gave me two choices in cars. One that had big NATIONAL RENT A CAR stickers plastered all over it, or one that was dirty. Some choice. I choose the dirty one as I didn't want to be singled out as Joe Tourist. He mentioned that I could get the car washed and the company would reimburse me.

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Yeah right. I really wanted to be their hired-help car-wash guy. Oh well. Let's just get on with it.

Once you get outside of Budapest heading Northeast, it's real boring. Flat. Nothing but farms if you're lucky. We got to Eger in pretty good time after we stopped briefly at Peter's apartment to pick up some hack saws, a pair of hedge trimmers, a scythe and some film. I was wondering if these were to be used on me or what? All we needed was a movie camera and who knows what could have happened.

When we got to Eger we checked out the town for about an hour and had a cup of coffee as we do every morning when we get to where we're going. We checked out the buildings and churches and tried to feel what it was like to live here in the 1850s or so. It's a cute place that currently supports tourists and vineyards. The big Churches were already built by the mid 1800s so I know that I've seen some of the things that my family did, and after about an hour of wandering around aimlessly, we drove to the cemetery. It was less than a five minute drive.

From the outside it looked fairly small. The gate was locked. There were no signs except one that stated, in English no less, to go around the corner to the caretakers house and go up the steps. So, that's what we did.

About three fourths the way up the stairs another locked gate kept us from entering the place. I noticed a button to the right that I assumed was a doorbell, pressed it, and after about 15 seconds, a middle aged man came out to see what the hubbub was. As he began to come down the stairs towards us, he said something aloud and Peter answered. Continuing down he began shaking his head from side to side as if saying "no way Jose" or "no way Mr. Mxyxptlk" or whatever Hungarian name you want to use (Hungarian is a tough language for an American - just axe me).

Anyway, here I am with cameras in hand looking like Joe Tourist from America not understanding a word anyone is saying with a dumb smile on my face and saying to myself "this was a very bad idea." Looks like we've come a long way for a cup of coffee.

Just as I was doubting myself and this whole trip, the caretaker unlocks the gate and lets us in. Peter had done his magic.

So we go into the cemetery, first passing a really mean dog, barking it's head off at me (it was chained but the caretaker still had to get in between me and the dog), and begin to look around. The caretaker is giving us the evil eye and checking us out while I begin to search for the oldest part of the cemetery and to see what language the headstones were written in. Were they in Hebrew or Hungarian or German? Was there anything that I was able to read? Most turned out to be in Hebrew which Peter can read and interpret pretty well, and I can read the letters about as good as a first or second grader. Some had a little Hungarian, which is a lot easier to read than Hebrew. So, overall not too bad.

After a few minutes of trying to get our bearings with the caretaker standing next to us, Peter asks him if he knows anything about how the place is laid out. Not a chance. No map, he knows nothing. Ok, this is going to be tough, I've done it before, but at least the place is reasonably well taken care of.

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Peter asks him if he's seen the headstone for Farkas Czeisler, but of course he hasn't. He only works here. Why should he know anything about this place? He's just the guy who mows the lawn. I should expect him to bring me wine and cake or something? Or maybe discuss his mother's recent trip to Miami to visit her sister Ethel? This is Hungary, that's what they do here. Mow lawns and feed the American tourists to their guard dogs.

So, with that in mind we begin our search. At least the caretaker was nice enough to point to the oldest section. We start to look.

As in any old cemetery, it has its broken, fallen and unintelligible headstones, and this one was no different. The only challenge was that the cemetery was a little bigger than I first thought. There are probably two thousand people buried here. The earliest headstone we found in the old section was from 1849.

After about 10 minutes of scratching our heads and conversing with the caretaker who was hanging around to see how foolish we could be, Peter advises me to give him some money, you know, something to help a little. A bribe. It couldn't have been a tip since he hadn't done anything except to let us in. Well silly me. Foolishly I ask Peter "how much?" being the neophyte in bribery that I am. Peter shrugs his shoulders and says "I don't know." Well anyway, I give him 5000 Forints, about \$15, and he walks away. Well that was \$15 down the tubes.

Several minutes later he comes out of the house holding two big black books and hands them to me. I open one of them and my jaw hits the ground. They're the *Chevra Kaddisha* (burial society) burial records. I couldn't believe my eyes. That was the best \$15 I've ever spent (except for my marriage license - (gotta keep the wife happy)).

Now let me preface this to tell you what this means and how important this was to me. I am a member of a special interest group for Hungary. It's just a mailing list associated with an online Jewish organization called JewishGen, but it's for people doing family research in Hungary. There is one project in progress called the Cemetery Project that is attempting to record as many Jewish graves as possible throughout Hungary. There are several people from Hungary on the mailing list, and many that have immigrated to the US and other countries. From my understanding, no one has ever recorded any grave sites in the Eger cemetery. Many have been done in other parts of Hungary, especially Budapest, and some other smaller cemeteries, but surprisingly none in Eger. Not only that, but most of the cemeteries have no book, no map and nothing to determine where someone is buried. And then you get the caretakers that don't give a damn and may not let you in at all. Basically, a large percentage of the books and information are lost. That's what I found later in the day in Gyongyos where Josephine is from. But that's another story.

One of the things that I wanted to do when I was in the cemetery was to photograph as many headstones as possible for the project. With that in mind, in one fell swoop, I had almost everything I wanted. With these books in hand, I didn't have to photograph the headstones because I had all of the information in hand. Yes! A victory.

So, where does the book start? It begins in 1869, the year that Farkas died! My heart was racing. But, as luck would have it, it begins one month, or actually a just few weeks

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after his passing in February. The first entry begins in March. No Farkas Czeisler is listed. Actually, the first three entries are listed as "unknown" and then the March listing.

In trying to find Farkas' grave, two things were against us. First, there was no map for the cemetery, only the book of names and a code of where the plots are located. Basically, it says that each plot is located some distance from the path. Have you ever tried to find a path in an old cemetery? And what path? There seemed not to be any clear delineation. The problem that we had was that we could not correlate any headstone with any name in the book. For at least two hours, we searched for a name on a headstone that was in the book to no avail.

Second, the book starts with section 3. The pages for the first two sections are empty. They're there, but they're empty. So there. So where do we start?

Slowly but surely we put our heads together to try to figure out the system. I found some lanes in the grass that I thought could be the paths, and Peter figured out the system of sections and rows. So together we had a plan. I found one headstone in the middle of the cemetery that had a very clear name and date and after about 5 minutes I found it in the book. I verified the location and it all checked out. I selected a second headstone and verified that one too. We now could map the sections and figure out where everyone was. No one had ever done that before.

Now that we had the information, we decided that it would be a good thing to photograph the pages of the book. We had four rolls of film between us and I also had my digital camera. So we began the chore of photographing every page in both books. Later in the day, after I had returned to the hotel, I noticed that it may be difficult to read some of the pages from the digital camera, but most are fairly clear. It was the best I could do at the time. I really tried.

In order to finish this email before daybreak, I'll cut to the chase. There are several Zeisler/Ceisler/Czeisler/Czeizlers in the cemetery, but none that we know for sure are ours. There is one Israel Zeisler in the book whose headstone fell many years ago and is almost completely decomposed. He died in 1870, about one year after Farkas. This could be a brother or cousin of Farkas. There are others too as I mentioned. I found one Zsigmond Czeisler family of four graves with very large black granite headstones. And there are many other Zeislers (and variations of) in the book that require some additional research.

We also figured that since Farkas died only a few weeks before the first entry (which has a headstone), he is probably one of the "unknown" burials. The first three plots in that section have no headstones at all.

Throughout this whole process, the caretaker is working with us to find Farkas. He's into it now and he and I are trying to communicate. He knows some English such as "bye bye" and "yes" (and probably "money"), so we were able to function well together. Actually he turned out to be a very nice man and I only wish him well. He really deserved the money after all.

Just a quick few items. We went to Gyongyos (pronounced something like "yun yosh") and boy was it ever overgrown. But the most fantastic things were the headstones. Let

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me tell you that these people had some money. And lots of it. That's back around the mid-late 1800s through the Holocaust. This was one heck of a wealthy community. Pretty much all of them were killed in Auschwitz.

Of course there is a lot more, but that's all that I'm writing tonight. It's sleepy time. Tomorrow is some shopping (my wife's favorite word), and then in the afternoon it's off to the Jewish Archives for some more research fun.

Good night.