

CAUSE AND EFFECT: A TRUE STORY

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August 1917 - the start of the Russian Revolution, which caused many changes in the lives of people living in this part of the world.

It took three years for the revolution to filter down to the small village of Stavisht located in one of the Provinces of Kiev. Stavisht was surrounded by beautiful lakes and ponds teeming with a variety of fish. Polish Count Branicki was the land owner of all the property in and around the village and the 1500 peasant families of all denominations, paid tributes to his estate.

Count Branicki's estate was located at the end of the only paved road, lined with trees, lilac bushes and benches. His palace grounds had orchards and beautiful gardens and they were attended by hired servants who lived on the property in well built homes. On Saturday afternoons and evenings villagers, both young and old, would promenade up and down the boulevard visiting the palace gardens and enjoying the comfort of his benches. Even though they were peasants, life was good and they all had religious freedom to worship as they desired.

Tuesday was market day in the village and all the farmers, merchants, and traders came to this little village and set up their stands to sell or trade their produce and products. Besides the Tuesday market, the village had shops of every sort lined along the main street which led down from the paved boulevard.

The first sign of the revolution occurred when some of the villagers rioted and charged the Count's palace, robbing, destroying the gardens and orchards, and finally setting fire to the estate and outlying buildings. The Bolshevik's army station in Kiev sent a contingent of soldiers to quell the outbreak of violence. They soon departed only after a few weeks.

The first bandit, his name was Zeleny, showed soon after the troops left. He arrived with 12 to 15 men demanding extortion money and goods. The Priests and Rabbi collected money from the villagers and paid them off and the village was temporarily safe. Rumors started to arrive of much larger groups of named bandits, some the size of armies, roaming the province. So the young men of the village started to arm themselves, with the weapons brought back from the First World War, and stand guard at night. The Bolshevik army in Kiev heard of this new security force and demanded that the clergy immediately disarm them or they threaten to send in their troops. They promised, convincing the clergy, they would protect them from the local bandits. So they gave up their weapons to the Bolsheviks in Kiev.

First the bandit Petliura came followed several weeks later by Sokolovsky. Sokolovsky came with an army of 100 to 300 men demanding 1 million rubles and goods. On the way into the village each group made examples of people by killing, robbing, and raping villagers. The religious leaders once again went door to door to collect money, clothing, boots, sugar, salt, and anything of value. No one ever came from Kiev to rescue or defend them.

In a short time the village was faced with a dilemma - there was nothing more to give. Rumors flowed in that one village after another was being burned to the ground. So many villagers decided to leave and seek help from family or friends living in other parts of Europe and other countries. The village was finally attacked and burnt to the ground, never to rise again. Yet the memory of Stavisht still exists in the memory of many former residents with writings, poems, and memorials of those who died by the hands of these bandits. Our shared memories will never let the world forget the treachery of the Russian revolutionary army station in Kiev.