

# Stebnik, Slovakia



## Briefly about Stebnik ...

The village of Stebnik lies in the north-east part of the Low Beskid Mountains in the valley of the Stebniček stream. The center of the village is 380 m above sea level. The village is comprised of 5,073 acres at altitudes from 375 up to 905 miles above sea level.

Stebnik is a typical Christian village. The majority of residents are of the Greek Catholic religion. Since 1838 they have gathered in a brick church dedicated to St. Paraska. Before the war, there were still a few Orthodox Christians living in the village. There is an Orthodox part in the public cemetery. There the graves face the east.

According to the last census in Stebnik the number of permanent inhabitants was 342. The nationality claimed on the census has changed radically over the last decades. Previously the village was more or less only populated by Rusyns, today there's only 10.8% Rusyns and except for a few exceptions the rest are Slovaks. (editor's note: I don't think the Rusins moved out and Slovaks moved in. This is an example of how Rusins have become Slovakianized)

In the past most of the people here made a living from harvesting the fields or working in the surrounding woods. They occasionally left for seasonal work, primarily to harvest in the southern parts of Slovakia. After the wars, most inhabitants were employed in an industrial city nearby.

### First mention

The first written notes about Stebnik are found in documents of King Zigmund in the year 1414. To the Cudar family he confirmed ownership of area Makovica. Stebnik is part of this area.

### Known names

The first mention of the village was in 1492 and it was called—Sthebnyk. From 1618 to 1727 the village was known as Sztebnik. In 1727 it was known as Sztebnyik. The village name is listed as Stebnik in first lexicon of Hungarian Monarchy in 1773. During the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

when it was law to use the Hungarian language the village was known as Esztebnek. Since 1918 it has been known as Stebnik.

### Epidemic of cholera

In the 1830's after a very poor harvest in the region there was a lack of food. Hungry people faced a Cholera epidemic. The break out in Stebnik started in July 1831. During one month around 40 people died of Cholera. This loss is documented in the Church register notes.

### Emigrants

By the end of 19th and beginning of 20th century a huge emigration of inhabitants from Stebnik began. Most of them emigrated to North America. Looking for job opportunities they ended up in USA, Canada, Argentina and France. From every house there was somebody abroad trying to start a new life. In some situations whole families left. Those who left their wife and children behind came back but the rest never came back. In USA most of them settled in Minneapolis, MN. In 1981 in the USA a list of immigrants to Minnesota between 1880 and 1947 was published. In the book "The Rusins of Minnesota" some of them are listed as founders of the Greek Catholic religion in Minneapolis - Felegy John, Felegy Peter, Purde Nikolay, Madir Vasil, Cranak George, Jacenko Dimitri, Bushko Joseph and Homzik Joseph.

### First world war

In 1915 the first World War hit the village very hard. A lot of men were recruited involuntary and most of them never came back. Almost all houses were burned down or heavily damaged. In the village and surrounding areas there were big battles between the Austro-Hungarian and Russian armies. In "Sikovka" above the village on April 3rd, 1915 3 battalions of 28. foot-soldier regiment fell to the Russian army.

Below the village is a World War I cemetery. It is a reminder to us and future generations of the cruelty and absurdity of all wars. 189 Austro-Hungarian and Russian soldiers are buried there. Some are buried separately and some in common graves.

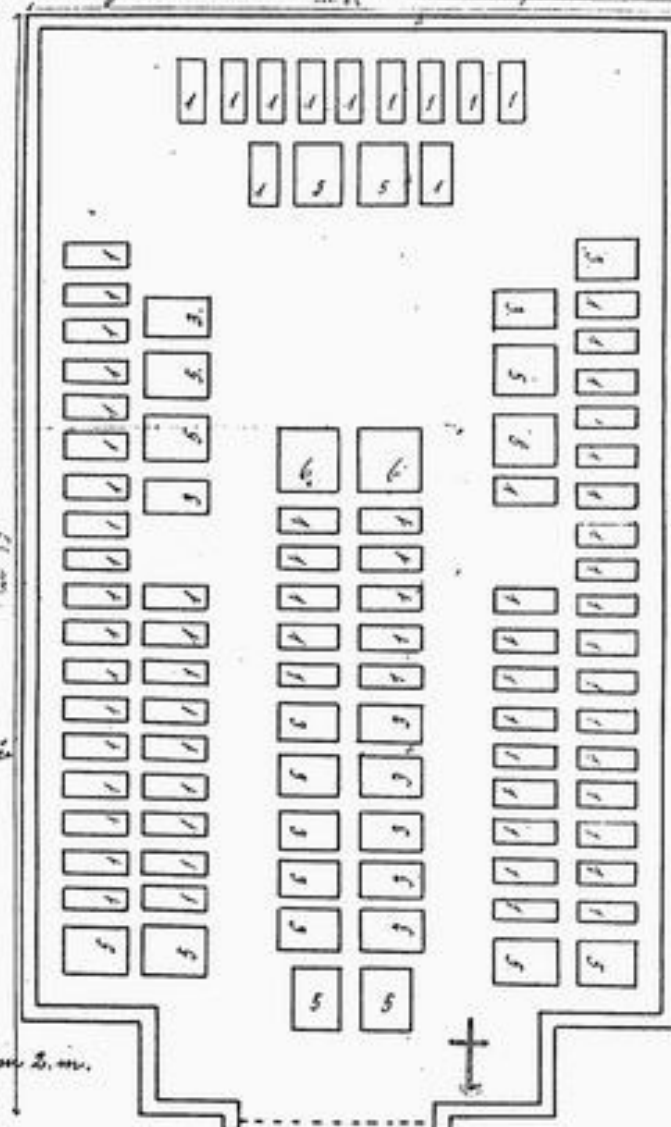
Editors note: This article was taken from the Stebnik website. For readability changes have been made in the English translation.

Ministerstvo Starodni Spravy.  
Zbiralni inop. voľ. hrobů!



Oblasť: Slovensko.  
Okres: Stobník,  
Župa: Sanytska,  
Okres: Gardion.

Skizma voj. hrobiska se 189 mrtvolami pri Stobníku nízšt. pramku



Legenda:  
Číslo v číslach značí  
koliko mrtvol se  
v hrobě nalezá.  
Ohraničení je bez  
rovnice podle koliky  
jsem

Měřítko 1: 2000 č. 2. m.

V Košicích, 15. 5. 1922.

Předmota a referent  
POLNÍ SUPERIOR  
Jozef Kopeš

## The Life of an Orphan (Village of Stebnik, Sharish County)

Translated from one of our old calendars, a sad story that ends happily. It begins in a little Lemko village which is the northern part of Slovakia.

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When my mother died I was just two weeks old, and my older brother was two years old. We were left with just my father, and father lived with his step-mother. Whenever he went, my father would pray that god take at least one of us, preferably me because I was more trouble than my brother. But God didn't want to take either my brother or me. So what did my father do! He picked me up one day and carried me to my grand mamma, my mother's mother. He asked her to take me for at least a week.

"Take her," he said, "if only for a week, so I can get some sleep." But grandma didn't have her own place, either. She was living with her younger brother, who was married. They didn't have any children, however. When my father took me over there, he also brought some whiskey, all three of them became more mellow somehow, and they urged grandma to take me. They said that I was being so quiet that evening as if crying was somehow forbidden for me.

So grandma agreed to keep me for a week, but father must come again at the end of the week and take me back. Father did come at the end of that week, but he asked grandma to keep me one more week. Grandma agreed – one more week. The second week went by, and then a third, but father didn't come to get me. He did come at the end of the fourth week, and he brought some more whiskey. He then asked grandma to take me "for your own". Grandma said, "all right! If that's the way you want it, I'll keep her as my own."

However, in the old country they never put anything down in black and white; everything was done on a man's word. Now that I had become my grandmother's "own", it seemed that a great load was lifted off my father's shoulders. He looked years younger, and he got married again. And God didn't forget them. He showered them with children – first

one, then another, and then two, all at once.

By the time those twins were born, I was 12 years old. And as you know, in the old country a 12 year old girl is suitable for any kind of work, at home and in the fields, not like it is here, where a mother is afraid to leave her 12 year old daughter at home alone. It was then that my father remembered that they had a 12 year old girl at grandmother's one that could be a lot of help to him. He came to see grandma, this time without any whiskey, and said: "I came to get my daughter. I need her."

Grandma said she wasn't sure I wanted to leave.

Father said if I didn't go with him, he would

"denounce" me. This word scared my grandmother so much that she urged me to go back with my father; else we would be committing a great sin. "I will sin, and you too will sin, my child." It didn't occur to her that my father had also sinned when he disowned me when I was two weeks old. And so, for fear of making sinners out of both myself and my grandmother, I was forced to go with my father.

When I came to my father's place, I found out right away that my life there would be much harder than it had been with grandma. Not only

was I expected to work both in the home and in the field, but I also had to go to work to earn some money for my father.

As soon as the snow was gone and it became a little warmer, I had to go to the lord's forest to plant fir trees. The landowners cut old trees for sale and planted new ones in place of them. We planted trees from dawn to dark for 45 kreuzers a day. And we had to work fast and well, because the overseer knew how to handle us poor workers. He would go along behind us and yank on a seedling once in a while. If it pulled out easily, he knew what to do. He would do this testing toward evening, so he wouldn't have to pay anything for the day. For one such seedling, he would firs curse the poor woman, swearing at her "Russian God" (he was a Magyar



(Hungarian), and then he would knock her down and kick her, and he would dock her a day's pay.

After this kind of work was over, we would have to go to some other lord to work in haying. In this job we didn't work for the money, just for hay, for the 12th shock. The lord got the first 11 shocks, and the 12th was for all of us. We had to cut the hay and rake it and bring it to his barn and put it where it was supposed to go. When haying time was over, we had to go to this same lord for grain harvesting. Here we worked to the 13th mandel (a bundle of 50 sheaves), that is the lord got 12 mandels and the rest of us got the 13th. Again we had to cut the grain, rake it up, dry it out, get it to the lord's place, and stow it where it was supposed to be.

When the grain harvest was over, we would go back to the same lord to dig potatoes. Here we worked for money again – for 50 kreuzers a day. Here again, that same overseer knew how to take advantage of us.

When it came evening, he would take the hoe from some poor woman and would dig where she had dug. If he found just one little potato, he would beat her with her own hoe and would send her home without paying a cent for her day's work.

That's how they treated us poor people. They could do what they wanted with us, for this was a feudal country with feudal laws, and the lords could do no wrong.

Then came that terrible World War (1), and life for the poor people became even worse. Now there was no place to get that hard-earned penny, no place to buy anything and nothing to buy it with. Speculators had grabbed up everything. In our mountains in those days, a farmer could scarcely manage to come up with enough food for his own family. Now he even had to give up some of that for the soldiers.

The first to come to our village were teamsters, and they stayed with us for six weeks. There were two or three of them in every house, and they ate up everything. When these teamsters left, regular troops came to the village and stayed for seven weeks. Again there were two or three in every house. So, first they ate up everything and then they started fighting. The

fighting around Stebnik went on for six weeks. And all the time those Magyars stayed in the village, they tortured our people. We couldn't get together even in groups of two or three. We couldn't have fires and we couldn't have any lights. We couldn't even keep or roosters, because they might alert the Russians. But the Russians came anyway.

When the Russians left and the Magyars came back, then they really took it out on us claiming that we helped the Russians. We couldn't have a Russian book in the house, not even a prayer book. Or if they found out that a man had been in America, or was Orthodox, that was it for him. One day, they fired 75 rounds at the church, because they thought that "Moscow's" were hiding there.

When the Magyar troops returned to the village, two of them went up to the local magistrate and said they needed two boys to guide them over the mountain to Twaroshek. So the magistrate went to one of our neighbors to get his son and then to my father for his son, my older brother, to guide these men over the mountain. So the two boys went with the men. But along the way, these men turned them over to some other soldiers claiming they were spies. These others took them all the way to Barddiev (Bardejov) and put them in jail. We expected my brother home for dinner, but he didn't come; at supper time he still hadn't come. We didn't worry too much though, because we had relatives in Twaroshek and we thought he would spend the night there.

Next morning, however, the father of the other boy came to our house and said they had learned that our boys had not taken the soldiers to Twaroshek but had been ordered to stand guard on the mountain and that they were now out there hungry and cold. He and my father decided to go up on the mountain and stand guard for the boys so they could come home and get warmed up, have something to eat, and put on warm clothes. So the two men went on the mountain, but there were no boys there, only soldiers. The soldiers grabbed both men as spies and sent them way out into Magyar country, where they were kept at forced labor for two years. Meanwhile, the boys were kept in the Barddiev (Bardejov) jail for a week and were then tak-



en into the army, as having come of age.

My father and the other farmer were badly treated by the Magyars and were compelled to do extremely hard work for a Magyar lord. My brother had to go shed his blood for Franz Joseph, my father was working at hard labor for a Magyar lord, and his children were left alone at home. And such a home! We didn't even have a roof over our heads, because our house had been shattered by shells and bombs. We didn't have anything to eat.

When the Magyars heard that the Russians were coming to our village, they began preparations to leave, but they didn't want to leave a single house standing. So they started setting the houses on fire one after another, and this they did at midnight. The people were sleeping in cellars and came out to try to put out the fires, because the shooting had stopped by that time. Do you think the Magyars would let them put the fires out? They would not. They attacked the people like wild beasts, beat them, and drove them out of the village, half naked, barefoot, and wet. They took children without their mother and mothers without their children.

One woman had left a small baby, about a month old, in her cellar. She begged a soldier, for God's sake, to let her go back there to get the baby. But this Magyar did not have enough compassion to let her go back into that cellar for her child. He just dragged this mother away, and the baby was left there all alone all night. Next morning a neighbor came by that place to look around and there was no one and nothing to see. But he listened and thought he heard a child crying somewhere. He approached the cellar, and there was the baby all alone. He was so shocked he didn't even pick up the little baby, but dashed back home and got his wife to come and get it. I think their baby is still alive today.

Another woman didn't want to leave her yard. She struggled to stay, so a Magyar soldier drove his bayonet through her.

Those people that were taken from our village were

driven somewhere beyond Priashev. But the people over there didn't want to take our people, and there was fighting and quarreling. So after a few weeks our people came back to the village, to their ruined homesteads. Somebody might think that the Magyars wanted to protect our people from the shells and bullets and that's why they drove us out. But the Magyars didn't care a bit about our people; all they wanted to do was destroy everything we had, so there would be nothing left for the Russians. In the entire village, there were only seven houses left; the rest were ruins with just fireplaces left standing.

Those that still had a man around could make do somehow. But our father was in Magyar bondage somewhere, and our older brother was in the army, so we had problems. Fortunately our grain shed was still intact, and we had some grain and old

clothes there. There was no window in that shed, but it did have a rood. We lived there for two years. We slept in the shed and cooked our meals outside in the fireplace.

There were days when we had nothing to cook and nothing to cook it with. Once it got so bad there wasn't a single chip of wood around anywhere. My younger brother and I talked it

over and decided it would be a good thing if we would get up early next morning and go into the lord's forest and bring back some dry branches. In the lord's forest there were lots of dry branches rotting away. That's what we did. We got up early in the morning, went into the woods, picked up a load of dry branches, and tied them on our cart. We even chained the wheels for braking, because it was quite steep. I crossed myself, and my brother crossed himself. He also made the sign of the cross over the path we had to follow and over our cart. We started out; happy that now we would have something to cook with.

We had gone only a short distance when suddenly our cart slid down a bank and tipped over. Neither one of us knew what to do now, where to start.



We didn't pick up the wood, we just argued. My brother yelled at me that it was my fault the load tipped over because I was walking beside it. I yelled at him that it was his fault because he didn't pull it right. So we argued for a while, and then sat down and cried. We just sat there and didn't even try to pick up the wood. Suddenly there was a rustling in the bushes beside the path, and out popped a dog. It was the lord's dog, and right behind it was the lord's servant, a Magyar.

Now we were in for it! This man came up to us and asked who told us to come here after wood. We said that nobody told us, that we didn't have anybody to tell us where to go. That we came on our own because we didn't have anything to cook our food with. But this Magyar just showered us with curses.

"Damn you fool Rusins! Don't you know that this is the lord's forest? Pick up this wood right away and take it to my yard."

So that's what we did. We didn't argue anymore, just went to work loading the wood on the cart again and hauling it to his place. There was already so much wood in his yard that there was scarcely room for ours, but we had to stack our bent and crooked little sticks there, while our yard stayed clean as a whistle. And we had to pay a fine, too. It didn't bother that Magyar servant a bit that our father was far off in Hungary, washing the tails of some lord's cows, that they had taken everything we had and we didn't even have anything to cook with.

We couldn't get anything during that war. There was nowhere to get work, and nothing to buy even if we had money. You couldn't buy anything from the speculators for money, even if you were dying. You could still get something for butter, cheese, or eggs, but not for money. Some of the soldiers did give us a little money for the things they took from us, but we couldn't buy anything with it.

The first thing we ran out of was salt. We couldn't buy salt anywhere, not in Zborow, not in Bardeyov. We had to go all the way to Shomwar, where they made salt. Even there you couldn't buy it for money; you still had to have butter, cheese, or eggs. And there people stood in line as in a "breadline". Those who were selling the salt watched the line closely, and when they saw that you had butter or something to trade they would bring you right up front even if you were far down at the end of the line. But if you had only money, you might stand in that line for a week and not get any salt.

Later they somehow got enough salt so we could buy it for money even in Zborow, but grain was short supply. We couldn't buy grain anywhere nearby. We had to go all the way to the Priashev area. The people there were better off; they had better land for grain than we did. They had grain but they couldn't get kerosene there, take it all the way to Priashev, and swap it for grain. We couldn't carry much kerosene, however, because we had to take it on a train.

One time we didn't have any butter, eggs, cheese, or anything else to trade, so we tried to get some grain for money. Three of us went down there, and we looked for grain all day. People there had grain, but nobody wanted to sell for money. Finally, toward evening we came on a man who sold us a little after we begged him, for God's sake. It took us two days to get this grain, and it lasted barely a week.

Later on we did it differently. We would go to work in the grain graveyard, to Chervenitsa, to Kukov, to Kelmemesh. Some of us worked for rich landowners, some for great lords. We were paid in grain. We had to work a whole month for 100 kilograms of grain. We had to sleep in barns; in one of those barns there were a hundred of us. It wasn't too bad when the weather was dry, but when it rained it was awful.

In 1920, I left for America. My journey wasn't very good, because the trains were so overcrowded I could hardly move. Many soldiers were returning home that year, some of them probably from prisons, some from camps. They weren't very happy. They had fought for Franz Joseph, and now they were coming home to poverty and bitterness.

When I reached the land of Washington, I realized right away that here the people are more civilized than in the old country. As we were getting off the train, the conductor helps the women down the steps with their packages. I couldn't believe this was real and not just a dream. It was like that, too, when I went to work. I could see right away that the bosses here treat their workers differently than do those gentlemen's lackeys in the old country. Here if the boss doesn't like your work, he won't beat you or dock your pay, as they do in the old country. He will just call you aside and say nicely that he doesn't need you right now but when something turns up he will call you, even though he has no intention of ever calling you.

Maria Lobants, Minneapolis



## FINDING YOUR ROOTS

Polly Russinik Walker

### Village of Stebnik, Slovakia

If you are lucky one of your family members has taken the time to record your ancestral heritage somewhere. It might be located in a family bible, written as a narrative or better yet, entered into one of the many genealogical computer programs available today.

If you are not so lucky, and are so inclined to do some research yourself, you will enter into one of the fastest growing pastimes in America today. Be forewarned however...it will become addicting!

In order to begin your genealogical quest you need to begin with yourself and your parents. Write down everything you know about them, especially important details such as dates and places of important milestones like births, marriages and deaths. Many people choose only to record facts while others like also to collect anecdotes about their relatives along the way. Then fill in information about you and your parents' siblings.

Once you have that information recorded it is time to move onto your grandparents. For most of us our grandparents were born in Stary Kraj (the old country). It is important before you begin to know a name and a place. If you do not know this information, ask

around. If your parents are still alive they can hopefully provide you with information. Another suggestion is to look for old family papers. Sometimes you will be amazed at what you find. For instance, I recently located my grandfather's naturalization papers after cleaning out my aunt's house.

Often times our elders kept letters from family members overseas which could indicate a possible home village. There are also many websites that have compiled lists of surnames and the villages they are associated with. Checking these websites may jog your memory as to a name you might have heard spoken about when you were younger.

Once you have established the name and village there can be several avenues to turn down in order to find your ancestors. The remainder of this article will deal with the village of Stebnik which is located in present-day Slovakia. If you are fortunate to have relatives from this village then you are in for a big surprise when it comes to researching your ancestry!

Several years ago I googled the word "Stebnik" as it was the village that both of my grandmothers hailed from. Imagine my complete surprise when I found a beautiful website complete with photos both old and new, recipes passed down from generation to generation, a small dictionary of Rusyn words used in that area but most impressive was the genealogical information.

<http://www.nioba.sk/stebnik/privat/index.htm>

Peter Varchol is the webmaster and grew up in Stebník but now resides in Bratislava. He faithfully maintains the website so that all of us can enjoy the information that is available on it.

The website can be viewed in Slovak, Rusyn or the English language however the genealogical information is only in Rusyn and Slovak. This should not present a language barrier as the Slovak language uses Latin letters that we are familiar with while the Rusyn language uses Cyrillic letters.

Once you click on the Genealogy tab you will see an introduction (in Slovak). Should you desire to read it you can always use [www.google.com/translate](http://www.google.com/translate). Copy the information you wish to translate, go to the Google website, paste in the information and select the language to translate from and to. While I have found that often times some inaccuracies occur with the translation, the main element of the message can be determined.

On the left side you will see an icon of a house at the top and below a listing of numbers. These numbers indicate house numbers in the village. Some are the original numbers, some are still in existence, others have changed house numbers and still others are no longer standing (indicated by a preceding X).

By hovering your mouse over each number you will see the family surname(s) of those that lived in that house. By clicking on the house number it will take you to a detailed listing of the inhabitants of that particular house.

In this example, the house of my maternal grandmother (#15), you will see three family surnames listed: Tkach, Bishko and Masley. The names go from oldest to youngest top to bottom. Here you will see the name of Juraj Tkach who married Paraska Dennis in 1840. These are my great-grandparents. Below you will see the names and birth years of their ten children, my grandmother being Helena born in 1867. Their son

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [www.nioba.sk/stebnik/privat/index.htm](http://www.nioba.sk/stebnik/privat/index.htm). The page is titled "Stebník" and has a navigation bar with links: Úvod, Súčasnosť, História, Genealógia, Fotoalbum, Folklor, Slovník, Adresár, Stopý, Diskusia, Všetci, Iné linky. The main content area displays a genealogical record for house #15, titled "Tkač, Biško, Maslej". The record shows a marriage between Juraj Tkač and Paraska Dinis in 1840. Below this, a list of their children is provided, including their birth years and names. The record also includes a link to a detailed listing of the inhabitants of that house.

Year	Name	Notes
1849	Hric	
1851	Ján	
1853	Jozef	
1857	Timko	
1859	Daňko	
1861	Nikolaj	House icon
1863	Mária	
1864	Paraska	House icon → № 86
1867	Helena	House icon → Amerika
1870	Vasil'	p. 1