

FARMING SOME LOCAL HISTORY COUNTRY PLEASURES

I have already mentioned that by about 1930 father had rented in the area of Veľké Janikovce and Veľký Lapáš several farms. These were hired from about 6 different landlords. In V. Janikovce were two farmyards, in V. Lapáš one, in a nearby hamlet Eger one and a couple more east of V. Janikovce. The yard in V. Lapáš was not very large. It was built in the traditional manner in the form of a quadrangle, shown in exhibit 82. There were stables, a granary, a house for the foreman and his family and a couple of rooms occupied by our book-keeper who had been moved from Bratislava. He felt most unhappy in the country. There was no indoor sanitation and he once complained to me that in the winter he was forced to use a bucket as he could not face the snow and ice. The importance of this farm was that it had an agricultural alcohol distillery, just behind the yard.

V. Lapáš was on a main metalled road from Nitra.

V. Janikovce is south west from V. Lapáš and also connected by road to Nitra. V. Janikovce was a larger village than V. Lapáš. Houses were strung along the main road, set back from it and trees - mostly communal fruit trees - were planted along the road. In these houses lived peasants and their families, each having a vegetable garden, some stabling and other agricultural sheds, similar to those I described in Madunice. South of the village the land descended towards the river Nitra and was completely flat. This allowed an uninterrupted view of Nitra town with its bishop's palace (see exhibit 83) and church, roofs and steeples, the Calvary hill on the left, the higher Zobor hill on the right (where Schnuki lived) and the military airfield which later became Nitra's civilian airport. North of the village the land climbed gently towards a low ridge and then descended to our farm yard and house in V. Lapáš. All this area of more than 4000 acres had our fields and two small vineyards. An unmetalled dirt road led across the ridge between the two villages and was used almost exclusively by us.

On the flat part of V. Janikovce was one of our farm yards shown in exhibit 57. Its buildings were structurally the best we had. It was large and also in quadrilateral form and had an agricultural distillery. The second farm yard was higher up, practically in the village. Its buildings were in poor repair. (See exhibit 56). It was, however, the mechanical

centre for the whole complex and had a large smithy and work shop. The farm house which went with this yard was relatively large and in good repair. It was on the main road facing the yard. It ^{garden} had a number of large trees. Here lived our head bailiff Mr. Orvan. He had a coachman at his disposal and two pairs of horses. One was used in the morning and the other in the afternoon. This enabled him to visit every part of the area daily. He never had a car.

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Velké and Velký means great. I don't know the origin of the word Lapas, nor how Janikovce originated, though Janik means little John or Johnny. The Hungarian name for V. Janikovce was Nagy Emöke. Nagy means great in Hungarian. I cannot resist to summarise here some information I have gleaned from the Nitra book (published 1977 pp 131/132).

The original name, first mentioned in 1113, was Emma or Emeca (the c would have been pronounced as k). The village belonged to the abbot of the nearby Zobor monastery. In 1397 it had a church and a vicar but the church was closed at the time of the reformation and reopened only in 1700. In the mid-18th century 96 families lived there, also 61 horses, 52 heavy oxen, 136 other cattle, 182 sheep, 175 pigs and bees from 19 hives. There were 8 large landlords all with Hungarian names. The church was renovated in 1744 and in 1755 a school was founded. Surprisingly, a Jewish community existed then (no doubt as a result of Joseph II's edict; MKS) which at the beginning of the 19th century numbered about 100 souls. It had its own rabbi and synagogue. In 1830 a fire totally destroyed the village. There was a cholera epidemic from 1831 - 1866, decimating the number of inhabitants from 1039 in 1843 to 792 by 1865. The church was restored once again in 1866. In 1872 there were 151 houses and 945 inhabitants. In comparison Nitra had in 1871 824 houses and 4892 inhabitants. By the end of the 19th century 4 large landlords are named all of whom have Jewish names. One of them, Vagyon, was one of our landlords. By 1921 V. Janikovce had 164 houses and 1008 inhabitants. In 1928/29 there was a strike of day labourers led by the communists and in the local council elections in 1929 the Communist party won. By 1939 there were 252 houses and 1376 inhabitants. V. Janikovce was incorporated into Nitra in 1975.

As far as I ^{hear} knew there were no Jews in V. Janikovce, other than our head bailiff and there was no synagogue - perhaps never rebuilt after the fire?. The interesting thing is that there was such a large Jewish community, following the Imperial edict. About the strike I knew nothing.

On this subject I cite from the same book, page 99, in which there is reference to unrest amongst farm-workers on a Schwitzer farm but as the Christian name is not given, it could be our or Schnuki's farm. It was the time of the great economic depression. This unrest was not just local. In October 1931 the flour mill in Nitra (grandfather lived opposite it) had only 6 days of wheat in stock and laid off 130 employees and 30 casual workers. Distribution of wheat was controlled by Prague and Nitra was conveniently forgotten. The crisis spread to other workers. Some wages were reduced. I now translate verbatim: " On 8th April 1933 representatives of farm-workers met at a conference in Nitra where they deliberated on the wage reductions. Particularly poor working conditions were on the large farms of Schwitzer, Hecht, Adler, Katscher and others. 378 farm workers entered a strike of 3 days. On 17th May 1933 a deputation of 300 strikers and unemployed went to the Circuit Court in Nitra and on 18th May 1933 the large farmers were forced to give way. They agreed to increase the daily wage from 6 Koruny to 7 K and the 8 k wage to 9 K and also to conclude a binding contract". These new wages amounted to 240 respectively 270 K per month but nothing is reported about concessions received by farm workers such as housing, a little land etc. In comparison, when I went up to Prague I had 1000 K to spend per month.

A specific reference to father appears on p 148 and deals with the situation at the end of the last war, when father was no longer alive. So much for the reliability of Communist historians.

Nitra was "liberated" by the Russians after a fight with the remnants of the fleeing German army who made a short stand in or near the town. That was a few weeks before the official end of the war. No one then knew what sort of legislation the restored Czechoslovak Republic might enact with regard to land. President Beneš and his group certainly favoured private property. The Communist party was in favour of state farms on the Russian model.

In contrast the peasants wanted more land for themselves and didn't care for state farms. The local Communist party were in a hurry and quickly expropriated all land and farms belonging to Germans, Hungarians and COLLABORATORS and distributed it to the village population. On the 4th May 1945 - the day before the official end of the last war, father's farms (he was already dead), which he had rented, were expropriated from their owners "because of unsatisfactory conditions which are against the interest of the community" as the official reason. The most preposterous lie is that father and the landlords, who disappeared in the Holocaust, and who had suffered such a great deal from the Nazis were suddenly branded as collaborators only to fit the myth of Communist history.



82. Farm-yard in Velký Lapaš. Roof of gendarmerie in background. Note water cart and two oxen wagons



83. Bishop's palace and church in Nitra

Similarly the farm of Paul Verö's family, of Magda and Teri's family and of other victims of the Holocaust were expropriated. Schnuki, having survived with her sister Marinka, had a prolonged struggle with the authorities but finally lost the family-farm too. She told me once how she and Michael had been fighting this illegal expropriation. It had even come to fisticuffs and poor Schnuki was once beaten up by the "liberators."

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After this digression, let me return to my life on the farm.

We lived in V. Lapaš. Its houses were mainly along the state road but at each end of the village roads branched off. One led to Lapašské Darmoty, renamed Gulianova after the last war after some Russian high officer, whose field headquarters were there for a short while. Here lived Magda and Terri and Paul Verö. The other minor road led to Eger, a hamlet where we had a farm yard and more fields. The village's inhabitants were mainly small holders, living in their own houses, which were similar to those I described in Madunice. Each family owned a cow or two, some young cattle which was sold and replenished by new-born calves, geese, chicken, ducks and pigs. They were self-sufficient for food except for flour, salt, vinegar, sugar and the like. There was sufficient wood for cooking and heating. Along the road were fruit trees and every family had 2 - 3 allocated. We employed men (hardly any women) on a permanent basis from the village who worked with the animals, in the distillery etc. We took on additional labour for singling sugar beet, planting and harvesting potatoes etc. Although these were casual labourers, it was taken for granted that every year they had guaranteed work for several months. For the wheat harvest we had to hire workers from further afield.


There was one inn - hostinec in Slovak - in the village which doubled for the shop and was about in the centre of the village near the church. It was owned and run by a Jewish family. This was quite normal of villages up and down the country for a century or longer and inns were often handed from father to son or daughter. The men from the village went there for a glass of beer or brandy, played cards or dominoes and smoked their long pipes in the winter or on Sundays. After church on Sunday or on feast days the male congregation repaired to the inn, while the women stood outside. Simple meals were available for the occasional traveller. Wedding receptions were held in the yard at the back, when fiddlers played for dancing. The shop sold sugar which came in solid cones, wrapped in blue paper, each weighing several pounds. Smaller quantities for sale were chopped off and weighed. Salt, paraffin, candles, cigars, cigarettes and pipe tobacco, matches (the old fashioned-sulphur type), simple medical

preparations, pencils, sewing things and other every day objects were on offer. The landlord would get involved in all sorts of transactions and deals, perhaps in apples, pears, potatoes, ^{fire}wood, etc. He probably was a money lender too and next to the vicar, the school mistress, the post mistress, the gendarmes and the squire, one of the few men who was fully literate. He might help draw up a contract or write an official letter for a villager.

The innkeeper disposed of the means and was sufficiently ambitious to give his children a good education. I have reason to believe that the inn, ^{in which} my paternal grandfather grew up, was not very different from the one I knew in V. Lapas. Father asked me often to get him a box of 5 Regalia Media cigars. I cycled to the inn and therefore knew it well.

Our house was at the end of a short road which turned off the main road (on the right coming from Nitra) between the farm yard and the gendarmes' house which was the only two storeyed one in the village. Along this road were houses and vegetable gardens belonging mostly to families

of our permanent workers, This road ended at a large gate which was always kept open and continued as our drive for 60 - 70 yards inside our garden. The road was flanked on each side by dense green hedges, much taller than a man. In front of our house the road opened into a gravelled area, large enough to accommodate several cars. It then curved to the right at almost 90° and up a slight incline, passed the ice house on the left and the vegetable patch and ended at the garage.

The house looked larger from outside than it really was and had a high tiled roof. Its walls were whitewashed. It was in the shape of a letter . The arrow shows the wall one saw from the gate. The rooms were large and had high ceilings. The inside walls were of white plaster. Heating was by means of tall tiled stoves and wood was used. The stoves reached almost to the ceiling and had a flue pipe through the wall to the chimneys. In the children's room the tiles of the stove were green. The stove in the bathroom, also fired with wood, was different. It consisted of a maroon coloured steel cylinder, about 2 ft in diameter with wrought-iron rings top and bottom and short iron legs. A hot water pipe, fitted with a tap, jotted out a short distance over the tub. This was no different from the white enamelled tub in Shepherd's Hill. There was a shower too. This consisted of a narrow-gauge rigid steel pipe running up along the stove and with a shower rose on top, controlled by another tap. To have a bath one had to light a fire at least half an hour before.

We had paraffin lamps like anyone else in the village. There were two types:

standing and hanging ones. The standard lamps had a glass cylinder with a bulge near its bottom. The suspended ones were of superior construction. There was a brass pressure container and to light the lamp one had to pump air and then light with a match. While burning it made a constant hissing noise but the light was much brighter.



Electricity was not introduced until later.

We had a phone and our number was 1. There were 6 or 7 numbers all told: the gendarmerie, the Schlesinger's, Verö's, the Public Notary in the next village and that's nearly all. There was a small post office with a nosey post-mistress who connected all calls. She was a source of information. When for instance I tried to ring Magda and Terri she would inform me that they were out and there wasn't the slightest point of trying to ring. Initially the sisters came a few times and I believe Mother came perhaps once or twice. Later Anni and Jean never came. The last nanny they had and who came with them to V. Lapaš hailed from near Vienna and was called Ulli Fuchshuber. She was only a few years older than me (and attractive - at least so I thought. She was the first woman whom I recognised as a successor of Eve albeit in a rather platonic way.

Cropping was on a 4 - year rotating system. Clover, lucerne and broad beans (all legumes, capable of fixing nitrogen from the air) were followed by wheat (clover was often left for two years); followed by root crops such as sugar beet or potatoes and then barley (rarely oats or rye). Maize was an alternative crop in the 3rd or 4th year. We also grew some 30 acres of tobacco every year. For this one had to have a state licence as tobacco was a state monopoly. At the time of harvest and right until the last leave was sold and carted away, there were excise officials resident and we had to provide guards to prevent pilfering. Tobacco is a difficult and labour-intensive crop. It is prone to pests and there were no effective pesticides then. After sowing and singling the tiny plantlets, the rows were hand-hoed at least once. When flowers appeared they had to be plucked off by hand (today chemicals are used). The lowest, small leaves were unsuitable and had to be removed by hand. Harvesting was in stages. First the lower leaves on the stems were carefully picked, then perhaps 10 days later the next higher leaves and so on. The leaves were carefully loaded on wagons and carted in bundles - making sure that no leaf was folded - to a huge barn-like timber building with louvres to allow air to circulate through. Women strung the leaves by hand onto long strong ropes. These were lifted up to underneath

the eaves and hung across the barn. The next lot was hung in rows below and so forth until the whole building was full. Drying took weeks or months, well into the late autumn or winter. When ready, experts arrived to grade the leave, now a golden brown and characteristic aroma. The dry leaves were somewhat brittle and care had to be taken to bundle them up and load them on lorries.

Father was an adventurous farmer. For one or two summers he had perhaps 10 acres under gherkins. There is a town in southern Moravia called Znojmo which specialised in the pickling of gherkins in glass jars of from pint to one-gallon sizes. Father and I visited some of the pickling factories there and a contract was concluded before the harvest for the whole crop. Another year we grew water melons on several acres but they all ripened at the same time as thousands of water melons all over Slovakia and it was difficult to get rid of them. In the end we sold them by the bucket, holding about three large melons, for a few pence. Never had I eaten so many water melons either before or since that summer.

To nourish the crops a vast amount of stable manure was needed. We therefore had hundreds of head of cattle. They were bought at the age of 1 - 2 years. The very young ones were kept on pasture by the river. When about 2 years old they were used for drawing harrows and sowing machines. In the summer they carted wheat sheaves or sacks of wheat or barley; in the autumn sugar beet and potatoes. Afterwards they were fattened and sold for beef. We also had horses, about 50 pairs, used for heavy autumn ploughing, re-locating threshing machines, carting sugar beet to sugar factories etc. Oxen were fattened on second grade grain, maize, potatoes, ground broad beans (humans did not eat them), chopped barley straw, dried clover and lucerne, sugar beet cosettes and residue from our distilleries. To supplement this diet some oil cake and occasionally fish meal was bought in. Wheat straw was used for bedding and ended up as manure.

Cosettes was the name for about 3 " long soft chips of sugar beet from which the sugar had been extracted. The beet were lifted by hand in the autumn and before the frost set in. The leaves were chopped off by women and these beet-tops were an excellent fodder either fresh or after they had been ensilaged in pits. These pits were covered with straw and earth and provided a nutritious feed during the winter.

The beets were carted daily in ox and horse wagons to the sugar refineries or the station to load them on ^{railway} trucks. In the factory they were washed, cut

into chips and charged into batteries of large pressure cookers. This released the sugar juice. The residual chips were returned to the farmer if he wanted them. They still contained some sugar, also proteins and fibre and cattle absolutely loved them, perhaps because of their faintly caramelised aroma. The refineries also dried them into small brown, somewhat brittle "noodles", rather like oversized "All Bran" and of similar colour. These were soaked in water as cattle feed.

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There was an alternative use for the cossettes, namely in our two distilleries. As they still contained sugar they were an excellent substrate for alcohol fermentation. They were first placed into a battery of pressure cookers, not very different from those used in sugar refineries, to extract most of the residual sugar content. Even these double extracted cossettes had nutritive value and were fed to cattle. There were stables near the distilleries and the cattle loved the warm sloshy cossettes, which were sweet smelling and generally served mixed with other dietary ingredients.

The warm extracted juice was pumped into large wooden or concrete fermenters, each about the size of our front room, inoculated with yeast and were left to ferment for several days at a controlled temperature. During fermentation the mash in the vats developed carbon dioxide gas, causing it to bubble and rise several feet. The gas was blown outside. When fermentation was complete, the mash was filtered, stored and then pumped into tall alcohol rectifying columns. These were made of beautifully shiny brass and copper and were 30 - 40 ft high. They yielded 96 % ethyl alcohol. Throughout the working campaign from about October to February/March we had resident excise officials. The finished alcohol was stored in large tanks to which the officials ^{fixed} lead seals for security. Road tankers took this alcohol to state distilleries which refined it to 100 % purity. The bulk of this was used in admixture with gasoline for cars and lorries. No lead was needed in petrol. Now, half a century later, gasohol has been "discovered" in Brazil and other countries as supplement for car engines.

The liquid residue from our rectifying columns was of a chocolate brown colour and had a caramelised, appetising aroma. It was cooled and pumped into the feeding troughs of cattle where it was mixed with solid meal.

One could make alcohol also from potatoes. As these contain starch and not sugar, the starch was first transformed into sucrose. The process used was exactly the same as used in breweries or whisky distilleries. The potatoes were washed, steamed and mashed and then put into large vats.

Separately, barley malt was prepared which contains an enzyme which transforms starch into sugar. Our own barley was spread on a clean concrete floor, about 1 ft deep, in a large room which was almost dark and had a low ceiling. It was kept moist to induce germination and the temperature of the room was controlled - hence the low ceiling, which minimises the volume of air to be conditioned. The sprouting barley was turned *with shovels* from time to time. During germination the enzyme developed. This barley malt was then added to the mash in measured quantities and transformation of starch into sugar set in.

When all the starch was transformed, yeast was added - same as described above - and alcohol fermentation followed. The fermented mash was distilled in the rectifying column. The residue still contained carbohydrates and was an excellent cattle feed.

We thus operated a complete cycle of crop rotation, provision for animal fodder and bedding, return of manure to the land and return of residues to the animals. We did use small amounts of purchased potash, phosphate and nitrogen fertilisers but these were only used sparingly under special conditions. The fixed nitrogen from the legumes which we grew was our principal source of nitrogen. It was a fully integrated farming system producing crops as well as meat and providing energy in the form of the traction animals and the ethyl alcohol for motor cars. The only change which occurred in the 1930 was the introduction of tractors (we only had three) and the increased use of horse drawn mower-binders instead of manual scythes.

We used one other form of energy namely steam produced with coal. This was the case with the steam boilers for the threshing machines and with steam ploughs. Most of the ploughing was done with oxen or horse drawn single or double share ploughs. Later, tractors were also used. Animal drawn ploughs had the disadvantage that the shares were not really deep enough for all requirements and because the daily area covered is small, this became increasingly expensive. For best results the soil must be ploughed every now and then to a depth of 12" and more to keep soil fertility. Both in Madunice and in the V. Janikovce / V. Lapas area we had one set of steam ploughs. Each set consisted of two self-propelling steam locomotives travelling at about 3 m / hr. On the front of the steam boilers and a short distance below the chimney, were brass plates which were always highly polished and ^{which} proudly proclaimed JOHN FOWLER LEEDS. I often wondered what that mysterious place was like. Little did I know that one day I would work in Leeds. The locomotives had huge rear wheels



84. Steam engines for ploughing. Left top: shares of the tipped up plough shares



85. A herd of our sheep. Left background the Calvary hill in Nitra.



86. Father in a field of wheat early summer 1932.

almost the size of a grown-up man. The engines made a deafening noise when travelling. To plough, these monsters were placed at each side of a field, opposite to each other. A strong, about $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter, steel cable was rolled up on a large horizontal drum below each engine. This cable was attached to an enormous plough of 6 - 8 deep shares. A man sat on the plough and with a steering wheel guided it along the last furrow, as the plough was pulled for- and backwards by the engines. The plough had two sets of shares, one of which was sticking up into the air while the other one was on the ground. When the plough arrived at one end of the field, it was tipped by hand and the help of the far engine and then the other set of shares was on the ground. It was thus possible to do 6 - 8 furrows at a time and to a depth of 18 " or deeper, depending on the soil. The men who operated the engines and the ploughmen worked in shifts. Water and coal had to be carted to the engines. Thus the total number of men for a set of ploughs was about ten. They had a "gipsy" caravan in which they slept. Stubble was never burned. Exhibit 84 shows the two steam engines with some of the crew. The man standing in the middle, his cap tilted to the side, was our chief mechanic, for whom I had great admiration.



We had 5 complete threshing tackles in the V. Janikovce / V. Lapas area, similar to the one in Madunice which I described above. We also used gangs of "imported" labour for the harvest in this area. Less people were needed when horse-drawn mawer-binders were introduced. These were not approved initially by the harvest workers. I remember one occasion when half a dozen such machines had been ordered to start cutting wheat in a field in the morning. It was a moon-lit night and the harvest gang had virtually finished cutting the wheat by hand by the morning. The only thing to do was to thank them and let them sleep during the day.

We were not in the dairy business and only kept a few cows for us, the bailiffs and the foremen. We did, however keep bulls in all the principal yards used for the insemination of cows belonging to the villagers. This was a sort of service expected from the big farmers and the amount charged per cow was minimal. It did ensure a higher quality of animals in the villages. Father once had the idea to breed beef animals and to build up a pedigree herd. He went to Switzerland looking for a suitable bull and purchased one of a race similar to the English Hereford. At great cost it was transported all the way to V. Janikovce, pampered

and cosseted with fine food and given the best place in the stable. When the first cow was introduced to him he failed to perform. The next bride was equally rejected and for weeks he never performed. The Swiss vendor arrived and investigated but to no avail. In the end the coy beast travelled back and father was recompensed. We heard later that once back amongst his beloved Alpine cows, he performed well and was none the worse for his Slovak un-consummated honeymoon. After that failure, father gave up the idea of breeding beef cattle.

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Occasionally we had 100 - 200 pigs. They were fed on boiled potatoes, ground cereals etc. Even when we had none commercially, there were always sufficient for our own needs and those of some bailiffs and foremen. Mr. Orvan did not touch pork.

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On the meadows near the river we had sheep, looked after by shepherds and their dogs. The sheep were of the black-headed Hampshire race. The sheep were also run over the stubbles before ploughing. In the winter their diet was supplemented with dried clover / lucerne, grain and silage. I have already mentioned the ensilage of sugar-beet tops. We also grew maize for the purpose. The main crop was used for producing maize corn, which was partly sold and partly ground and used as feed for our animals. Some acreage was planted very densely, so that the plants grew high and did not develop cobs. Just as the plants started flowering they were cut with scythes - not all of it but as required ~~daily~~. Throughout the cereal harvest, armfuls of this fresh fodder ~~was~~ given to the oxen pulling the wagons. What was left standing was cut in one go, dumped into pits, covered with wheat straw and earth and left to ferment. By the winter it had turned into a brown, treacly sweet smelling fodder. It was cut with a huge knife and carted to stables and wherever needed.

Exhibit 85 shows a herd of sheep, the shepherd and his dog and father. The hill in the background is the Calvary in Nitra. (See also exhibit 55).

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Some of the fields were too far to let the sheep run over. It was an unwritten agreement that villagers were permitted to pick the ears they could find and take them home. The same applied to maize fields. The village children, whose job it was to look after their geese and goats were also allowed to use the harvested fields. Sometimes there was a jolly gathering of women and children with their animals, chatting away, picking poppies, singing and generally having a good time. One morning I was out

riding when I noticed some children and their geese at an unusual early hour in one field. I was not sure whether the big horse rakes had been over it to gather the last stalks. I drove the children away amongst much gagging and flapping of wings and tears in the eyes of the children. Father was far from pleased with my zeal and I was very sorry. Never after did I again drive gatherers and children away.

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what did I do all day ?

In my younger years I tried to learn every aspect of farming. Most fields were large, some of 100 acres or so. There were no hedges but sometimes some trees along the edges. It was not always easy in a big field to assess when the crop was ripe unless one walked across it. Leaving at perhaps 8 am in a horse drawn carriage, father and I alighted at a field and walked right across it, taking great care not to damage the stalks. Exhibit 86 was taken in midst of a large field in early summer 1932.

We also stopped at fields where cutting was in progress or where threshing machines were working. We visited granaries where the wheat was cleaned, sifted and transported mechanically onto big heaps. There were special thermometers and samplers at the end of long poles which were thrust into a heap of wheat or barley. Somewhat unripe grains could lead to fermentation, spoilage and rise in temperature which in the extreme could lead to self-ignition. In such cases the heap had to be shovelled to let air cool it. (That was before the advent of grain silos where all this is being taken care off mechanically).

An important thing was to work out the yield per acre and the total tonnage of the harvest for each cereal. There were weighing machines at the threshing machines and again at the granaries. One had to allow some loss of weight due to drying. The sooner one was able to assess the total tonnage and quality, the better for selling it at an attractive price. At times Father started selling before the harvest was completed. It became my job to take samples and to note down all the relevant figures.

Later in the summer, potato, sugar-beet and maize fields were similarly inspected by us. There were not too many animals in the stables in the summer, but in the winter months Father inspected every stable at least once a week. The sheep, tobacco field, mechanical workshops etc. were all visited from time to time. Mr. Orvan did much the same. Father phoned him in the morning and they agreed who will go where. They also arranged one meeting on most days at one of the harvest sites or one of the farm yards.

We used to return home at around noon. It used to get very hot in the summer and father took a short rest. Afternoon we went out again in the carriage with a different pair of horses. On some occasions we went out in the Tatra, but this was unsuitable for unmetalled roads or driving across fields. When father had some work in the office I spent some of my time in the farmyard, helping to clean the stables, spreading bedding, clearing out muck etc. I thus gained some practical experience as well.

Any major trouble was reported to father. Breakdown of a threshing machine, an ill animal, a fire etc. He also dealt with buyers, concluded contracts with the sugar refineries, looked after the business side of the distilleries, dealt with excise for tobacco and did many other jobs. He also had to deal with correspondence and a lot of administrative work. Depending on circumstances we drove about 3 times a month to Madunice. Occasionally we stopped in Hlohovec, which was on the way, to call on grandfather Szilard. Father spoke every day with the madunice bailiff.

CATTLE MARKET

A most exciting event was to go to a cattle market. These were held on certain days in the calendar in Zlaté Moravce, Levice and other towns. It meant getting up before daybreak at 3 or 4 as the best buys were made at the beginning of the market or even before it opened. Driving in the cool morning, watching the sun rise over the pretty wooded landscape and the peasants starting with their chores in the villages was an exhilarating experience. As one approached the market town, the road was busy with peasants leading cattle, calves, horses and fillies; oxen and horse drawn wagons and carriages loaded with pigs, sheep, goats and poultry; groups of peasants walking barefoot carrying their knee high boots on their shoulders and all the other folk attracted by a big market. There were basket makers with their wares on the back. Women with big back loads of cucumbers, melons and other produce and others more. The closer we were to our destination the more crowded was the road and at times we moved at snail's pace. Adjacent to the cattle market were stalls selling pitch forks, hoes, milking pails and other implements, also boots, items of clothing etc. Most peasants came with their wives, often with their small children which all added to the congestion and bustle, not mentioning dogs, frightening the animals. A veterinary checked all animals entering the compound for the animals which was surrounded by wooden railings. Some of the animals were tethered to the railings. They were given hay and water.

Pats of fresh warm manure made walking a little hazardous.

Father, like all the big farmers, had a white light coat over his suit. His pockets were stuffed with bundles of banknotes, obtained from the bank the previous day. All market transactions were in cash. Béla Szemző we often met at these markets as well as other farmers. The actual buying, dealing and haggling was never done by the farmer himself but by a specialised cattle dealer. The final decision was, however, father's, usually just a nod of the head. We always had the same dealer called Rapschitz, a short fellow with a sharp Jewish nose, drooping moustache and always wearing a pointed green hat, looking like one of the seven dwarfs and often puffing a short S-shaped pipe. His eyes darted hither and thither and nothing could escape his sharp eyes and ears. I am recreating a typical bargaining conversation between him and a peasant for a pair of fine two year old steers. The prices are fictitious as I can't remember the prices of cattle.

Rapschitz: How much for this pair of scraggy emaciated calves ?

Peasant: I can't see any such calves

R: Come on, aren't they yours ?

P: You mean these, my two ? the best on the market

R: Aren't they for sale ? I asked your price

P: You sure don't want to buy scraggy emaciated ones ?

R: If they are not calves, they must be little three year old ones

P: You must be blind

R now walks to the front of the animals and looks at their teeth. Having convinced himself that they are about two years old, the haggling continues

R: So you have no price ?

P: As you happen to ask me: 600 the pair

R: You're crazy. I can buy any number like that for 400 a pair

At this moment there are two possibilities: either for Rapschitz to go away or to continue haggling. When there were a lot of buyers it was advisable to continue. If only few buyers, compared with the number of animals on offer, were present, it was better to leave and start a similar conversation with other sellers. Father, who stood next to Rapschitz, noted the asking and offered prices on a piece of paper. When the haggling continued - either straightaway or a bit later - it got down to earth.

P: Do you want to buy or waste my time ?

R: Look, I don't want to waste your or my time. we can settle right now.

I give you 450 for the pair

R: I don't want your money. You can keep it. If it weren't for you (turning to Father) I wouldn't even speak to that man. I said 600 and that's it. (After a pause) But just to show your master (looking at father again) what sort of person I am, I say 550 and that's my last word. Take it or leave it

R: Is that all you can say ? Take it or leave it ? There's your wife looking at you

P: Leave my wife out of this. They are my own animals

At this point the bargaining moves to a critical point. R stretches his right hand out, palm downwards. If the seller is interested, he slowly and hesitantly puts out his right hand, palm upwards. There is a distance of about 3 " between their two right palms.

R: So God help me, you'r a stubborn fellow and I can't waste any more time. I give you 475 and that's it

P: I am not budging. You'll get the best animals on the market, so God protect me.

In a mock rage Rapschitz slaps the seller's hand which falls back to the peasant's side and Rapschitz pretends to murmur his mock indignation to father in German. The conversation with the peasant is in Slovak. If father now encourages Rapschitz, the latter grabs the right palm of the seller. If the distance between the palms has narrowed to 1 or 2 ", that is a sign that the peasant wants to sell.

R: I have done all the Goddam talking and you just stand there and say nothing

R: 475 is no good to me. I have a family, I've got to live but if you say YES straightaway you can have them for 525 and I swear to God I won't go lower

R: Well if that's the way you talk (Rapschitz's palm is now almost touching the peasant's palm) I give you 500 and if you don't take it then you have lost the deal for a paltry 25

The peasant clasps the hand without any more words being said and the deal is clinched at 500.

Father gave the peasant a deposit of about 10 %. The wife takes some of it and goes off shopping. Rapschitz takes out of his pockets a pair of scissors which have bent tips and neatly cuts the fine hair on the left side of the animal's back into 55, father's initials, but like a logo known by everyone throughout the markets.

The same performance is repeated until the required number of animals, usually 20 - 30, have been purchased. If things went well, business was finished at around 10 am, if not it could drag on for hours. Business done,

we bought from an open stall a pair of sizzling sausages or frankfurters with french mustard a big roll or slice of fresh bread, perhaps a pickled cucumber.

Depending on market conditions, father found a chair or upturned box to sit on and the sellers came along to get the rest of their money. He knew all the prices, having jotted them down and the names of the sellers as well. He remembered every animal and in any case the peasants were honest and never changed an animal (they could have cut the $\frac{5}{5}$, nor did they go back on the agreed price. Father counted out the banknotes into their hands and the peasants sometimes made jokes. One could see from their faces whether they thought they had driven a good bargain or not. In general, there were smiles all round as well as wafts of brandy acquired with the deposit money. Rapschitz fixed up two or three drovers whose task it was to take the animals to one or the other of our farms. The journey could take 1 - 3 days. Theirs was a highly responsible job. There was always the chance of an accident or a beast running away and getting lost. Places had to be found for night rest and fodder and water had to be arranged.

A goulash and a chunk of bread was our lunch, eaten in the open air. Rapschitz usually came back with us in the car and afterwards the chauffeur took him to Nitra, where he lived. It made a long and tiring day but not without its excitements and interest. Not until the drovers had delivered the cattle without mishap, was father satisfied.

HARVEST RITE

I have already described the custom of a decorated bow being tied to the left arm at the beginning of the harvest. Far more important and elaborate were the customs at the end of the harvest. The centre piece was a beautiful hand made structure in the shape of a church bell, 2 - 3 feet across at the bottom and about 3 ft high. Each village had its characteristic traditional shape and patterns but there was sufficient latitude for the artists - and they really were artists - to let their creative imagination go. These "bells" were made entirely from straw, apart from a concealed wire skeleton. The straw was woven and plaited into fanciful patterns, some like fishbones, others into squares of different textures, others were like round medallions. Strands of straw gave the bell its shape. Coloured



ribbons, ears of wheat, poppies, cornflowers, glittering pieces of mirror and tiny coloured tinsels were all formed into pleasing shapes. It takes several pairs of hands several days to accomplish the construction of the bell. When ready it was fixed to one end of a long pole which the foreman of the harvest gang carried at the head of a procession to our house. The other workers of the gang as well as others from the village walked behind him. Children were running around and dogs were weaving in and out. It was dark when the procession arrived, accompanied by a fiddler or accordionist. Our own foreman and his family had gone ahead to be part of the reception party. We heard the procession walk up the drive, singing hymns and folk songs. One of the two entrance doors of our house was rarely used but for this occasion the heavy inside iron-bar was lifted and the door opened. Below it were 2 or three steps. Father stood there, I a little behind him, Mariška and other servants behind us. Lanterns were lit. The procession stopped about 5 yards from the steps, the music and singing stopped; the foreman took his hat off, made a step or two forward and hesitatingly made a speech, thanking God for the good harvest, wishing us happiness and God's blessings and thanking his fellow workers. It was the custom to sprinkle water on the speaker when he finished his speech which father did a little hesitatingly but our cook Mariška had no qualms and poured over the poor fellow's head a whole bucketful of water, releasing cheers, laughter and catcalls from the 60 or more assembled throats. Amidst the turmoil the dripping foreman handed the bell to father. This and two or three more were later fixed to the ceiling of the corridor and remained there until the next harvest.

Father handed the foreman some money and thanked him and the gang for their work and expressed the hope that they might return in the following year. The musicians started up with a dance tune and we were invited by pretty girls, dressed in their fanciful finery, to join in. After a while the crowd dispersed and drifted slowly towards the inn for supper and more dancing and singing. We heard them from the direction of the inn until the early hours of the morning.

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When I was older I helped father with the figures to work out the yield of the various crops, the quantity of seed grain to be retained and the plan of what to grow on each field in accordance with the crop rotation system. I think it must have been in 1934 when I spent about 3 weeks in Madunice working with the bailiff there. I was weighing sacks of wheat and barley, inspecting the granaries, assisting in mixing the feed for the

cattle, watching the work in the smithy and spending hours at the three shing sites.

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the two vineyards² were small. We had a "vigneron" and a hand press. Father did not take much interest and left everything to him. The wine was red and rough and had to be drunk young. We didn't sell any and used it ourselves and bottles were given away to bailiffs and friends or used at shooting parties which father arranged in the winter on our fields. Part of the vineyards were planted with dessert grape stock. The ^{grapes} were of pinkish colour, elongated and had a thick skin - a sort of natural forebear of the greenhouse grapes one now buys in shops. They were strung up and hung in the larder both in the house in V. Lapas and in the flat in Bratislava. Providing the temperature was kept even and cool they kept for a long time and were a much appreciated fruit at Christmas.

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Our ice house near the vegetable patch in the garden in V. Lapas had an area of a good sized room and had been dug to a depth of 8 - 10 feet. Over it was a thatched roof and it had a small wooden door on a lock. During the winter, ice was hacked and chopped from the frozen river and quite big blocks were carted into the ice house. It was filled to ground level and covered with a thick layer of wheat straw. During the summer the ice melted, the water disappearing into the ground. As the level went down one had to use a ladder to get to the stored food. We kept mineral water (from a well on the Zobor hill), various meats, including from home slaughtered pigs, pickled cucumbers and other goodies. The ice was used when making ice cream and it was clean enough to use in drinks, but that was not the general custom.

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Bread was baked once a week in an oven outside the garden fence. At the same time bread for the book-keeper and one or two peasant families was baked too. The loaves were round, about 1 ft in diameter and had a tasty crunchy crust. The inside of the loaves was not white but rather like a wholemeal loaf here.

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Pickling was used for preserving vegetables for the winter such as sauerkraut, red cabbage and cucumbers. Mariška pickled ^{large} cucumbers in wide-necked gallon glass jars. Vinegar, salt, dill and other spices and chunks of bread were added. The neck of the jar was tightly closed with parchment or preferably pig's ~~stomach~~ ^{stomach} (?) and the jars ^{were} stood into the sun for

a few days. When fermentation set in, the covers swelled up due to the development of carbon dioxide gas and formed a translucent dome. When fermented the dome collapsed and formed a tight flat cover. One could keep pickled cucumbers for many months.

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We had a dog who often accompanied me on my morning rides. Once a young deer was presented to me, once a fox. They were kept in makeshift wire netted enclosures but released after a few weeks. It was interesting for me to watch the behaviour of these animals.

COUNTRY PLEASURES

Life on the farm was not all work.

Father never liked shaving himself. So there was a good reason to go to Nitra late afternoon after work was done, to visit the hairdresser. Sometimes he combined his trip with business, to meet a grain buyer for instance. When there was time left or when it rained and field work had to be stopped he went to a café to meet friends or to have a game of cards, though this was generally reserved for Sundays. The café was in the hotel "Schiller" in the main street. It was rather dark but was a good centre to meet friends. In the summer there was an open air café / restaurant. When there was time and father otherwise occupied in Nitra, I used to go to the Giesser swimming pool in the river, weather permitting, meeting friends.

Nitra prided itself to have an open air cinema. In front of the screen were rows of chairs and at the far end a roofed terrace with tables and chairs where one could have a meal while watching the film and after it was over one could linger there over a coffee. The proud owners of this establishment were the Starks. They also owned an indoor cinema in Nitra. Dodo Strak, who now lives in Cologne, used to be a "bit of a lad". Well built, though a little on the heavy side, and his mouth in a characteristic angle, he had the permanent grin of the accomplished maître d'hotel as he made the round of the tables, standing in for his father, bowing and asking "is everything alright?" Exhibit 87 shows father and me on the cinema on 1st April 1934.

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I had the occasional visitor stay with me. Peter came on several occasions. Leslie Eggerton at least once. Henry Brandon came in the summer of 1936 when he drew my portrait shown in exhibit 88. I always enjoyed introducing these "townees" to the mysteries of the fields and stables. Terri and Magda I used to visit frequently, nearly always unannounced. On my bike I took a narrow footpath behind our fence, running along a



87. Father and me in the open air
cinema in Nitra 1st April 1934



88. My portrait by Heinz Brandeis
alias Henry Brandon, summer 1936



89. with Terri and Magda, 26th August 1934



90 a, b Hay making in 1932

brook bordered by lush growth on its banks, to the road about 1/2 mile away. Then I continued on the road, over a bridge and up a hill and then free-wheeled down almost to the Schlesinger farm house. On the left of the road were their fields, abutting one of ours. The parents always made me very welcome. I, who lived in Bratislava, went to a real gymnasium and had been to Switzerland and skiing abroad was for them a "man of the world". A table underneath a big shady tree was laid with a clean cloth, pretty china and dainty cakes, I was the centre of attention of three domesticated ladies. Many a young eligible man found his way here but with me the girls let their hair down and did not have to be on their guard and we chatted freely. Sometimes Paul Verö joined us. He only lived a few minutes' walk away. At that time he was a keen saxophonist and I used to hear him after dark in V. Lapaš.

Quite a few times I picked up Terri and Magda in our smart light carriage drawn by a pair of greys (i.e. white horses). The girls had prepared a hamper which was stowed onto the back and off we raced to the Cétényke river. There was a particular spot where the river was shallow and safe and the water clear. One could see the gravel in the river bed. It was not far away from the bridge shown in exhibit 54. We spent hours bathing and talking and tucking into the contents of the hamper.

The summer after I had been to Switzerland, a cousin of the boys I stayed with, called Petroushka Pilet, stayed with me for a few weeks. He was tall, slim and fair haired and considered himself a great poet and lover. He recited Verlaine and other French poets to me and fell head over heels in love with Magda. He came bathing with us. When I was busy he sometimes just wandered off to see Magda.

Exhibit 89 at the river. It was taken on 26th August 1934. Note album of gramophone records on left.

Exhibits 90 a and b show hay-making in 1932.