

A Little Genealogy: The Man from Jasz/Jasov/Joss

Ladislau Gedeon Became Noted Teacher, Law School Dean, Poet and Nobleman

By Les Gapay

Our ancestors of long ago can come to life a little, so to speak, in the genealogy research that is so popular nowadays.

I always wanted to know about my Gedeon ancestors in Hungary.

I didn't know much about the genealogy of my Gedeon line for many years until I recently struck gold, fittingly since the family originated in a mining region of Hungary that is now in Slovakia.

All I knew since getting a family tree in 1990 from a relative in Budapest was that my maternal great, great grandfather, Antal Mayer, was married to Aloyzia Gedeon, daughter of a nobleman named Ladislau (Laszlo) Gedeon.

The tree said Aloyzia (Eloise in English) was born in 1805 in Nagyvarad, Hungary (German: Grosswardein), now Oradea, Romania, and died there in 1863. There were no other details except that she was married to Mayer (1805-1874), chief physician of the city.

My late mother was born in Nagyvarad as Maria Mayer, so from her relatives over the years I got names and information of Mayers and also Barczy and Kozepesy on her side, fleshed out by research on my part. I also knew about and then made more discoveries regarding Gyapay and Leyrer on my father's side in another part of Hungary.

But the Gedeon side was more difficult for me to get information about. I did find several years ago in an internet search that Ladislaus (or Laszlo in Hungarian) Gedeon had been dean of the law academy at Nagyvarad/Grosswardein/Oradea. Then, a check of a nobility book online on Hungary listed his name.

I wondered how long his family had lived in Hungary and where they came from. All that a Hungarian relative in England could tell me was that her family tree showed that Gedeon's daughter Aloyzia's birth year had been changed on her tree from 1805 to 1806 and that she married Mayer in 1834.

One day, I noticed that the Mormon (LDS) genealogy web site, familysearch.org, had a cache of half a million Hungarian funeral/obituary notices gotten from the Hungarian National Library. I found ancestors from all sides of my family there, including Aloyzia Gedeon. What is neat about those funeral notices, which people had printed and sent to friends and relatives, is that they gave details about the death and listed many survivors.

Aloyzia's death was announced by her husband and by four of her siblings in September of 1863. Her father Ladislaus wasn't listed, so obviously he had died by then. The notice said Aloyzia had been married 30 years and lived 53 years. So that would put her birth in 1810, not 1806 or 1805. It's not uncommon to find date errors on family trees, or even on obituaries.

In my research of other relatives, I came across a book online of the history of Hungarian counties and cities that also included nobility names. I looked up Gedeon and found that Ladislaus was listed as professor and director general and then in later years as deputy director of the Nagyvarad Royal Academy of Law, which had been founded by Empress Maria Theresa in

1780. He also had a street named after him in Nagyvarad: Gedeon Street. The book said he was a teacher and writer in Nagyvarad for 50 years. It noted his nobility title.

All good information, but still I wanted to add even more flesh to the bones and wondered where he was born and came from originally.

In early 2015, I checked with my relative in England to see if by chance her tree showed a spouse name for Ladlslaus Gedeon. Sure enough, it did. It was Anna Pillman. So I did a search on the LDS website and found the marriage document. The couple was married in Rozsnyó, Hungary (German: Rosenau), now Roznava, Slovakia, in the Catholic Church in 1800. The marriage document listed Anna's age as 19. From that I found Anna's baptismal record fairly easily, March, 3, 1781 in Roznava. That document spelled her surname as Pilmon. Not unusual to find variations in name spelling centuries ago; Gedeon historically has several, too, including Gedon and Gedohn.

With this information I found a total of seven children for the Gedeon-Pillman couple. Some of their children were born in Roznava/ Rozsnyó, others in Nagyvarad/Grosswardein.

But what about the law professor himself?

I kept doing internet searches for his name under both Ladislaus and Laszlo and finally, what do you know, I came across a July 29, 1860 Budapest newspaper (Vasarnapi Ujsag) article about him. Front page, no less. With a good picture of him, perhaps an engraving made based on a photo. The article was very favorable, a nice feature story with a lot of information.

It said he was 91 at the time and retired 20 years earlier from the law school. The story gave his birth as March 18, 1769, in Jaszobanya, Hungary, later Jaszo, Hungary, and now Jasov,

Slovakia. It is Joss in German, and the area still includes many ethnic Germans, whose ancestors came from Germany mostly as farmers and miners centuries ago. Banya in Hungarian means mine. The area was a mining region and in medieval days Jaszo and many of the towns nearby had the word banya at the end, later dropped, according to a Hungarian history of the region. The town also is home of a large, famous monastery.

The Budapest newspaper article said Gedeon got a law degree in Kassa, Hungary, (now Kosice, Slovakia) and clerked for the Royal Court in Pest, Hungary (before it was Budapest). But, it said, his first love was teaching, so in 1797 he returned to Roznava, where he had attended high school, and got a position teaching rhetoric and poetry. In 1805 he was appointed by Hungary's King Francis to a professorship at the Nagyvarad/Grosswardein law academy to teach state law and mining law. He eventually became head of the school.

The story said that in addition to legal works, mostly in Latin, Gedeon had written a book of poetry in Hungarian in 1823 called "Useful Fun" aimed at youth. The article said he was recommended for the nobility title in 1837 and received it in 1839. The newspaper talked about Gedeon's years of public service, with many of his students going on to become famous, illustrious leaders. At age 91, he was spending time with children and grandchildren, but kept up with newspapers and literature, the piece said.

I then found Gedeon's funeral notice/obituary on familysearch.org. His death was announced by my Mayer and Gedeon ancestors, including Aloyzia, his daughter. He died July 2, 1863, in Nagyvarad of "old age," the notice said, just three years after the newspaper biography of him.

There was no birth record on familysearch.org for a Ladislaus or Laszlo Gedeon in Jasov for 1769 per the birth year from the newspaper feature. But his obituary appeared to say in Hungarian that he died “in his 96th year,” apparently meaning he was 95 but going on 96. So at age 95 in 1863 he would have been born in 1768, not 1769. (At age 96, he would have been born in 1767. I found no birth record for him in 1767, either.)

I did find a Ladislaus Gedon (common spelling variation or even mistake) baptized Catholic in Jasov/Jaszo/Joss in April 1768. His parents were listed as Franciscus Gedon and Elizabetha Kertesz. The exact day in April of the baptism isn't visible on the image from microfilm. Catholic births often are prior to baptisms so it's possible the March 18 date for his birth in the newspaper article was correct, just the year was off by one. Or he could have been born in April and the newspaper was wrong on the data, which sometimes happens. I found that the same Gedeon or Gedon parents also had a daughter Anna Maria Gedon born July 3, 1766, in the same town. These are the only possibility for Gedeon's parents in that small town around the years of his birth, so they are very likely the ones.

Gedeon's daughter Aloyzia, my great, great grandmother, died Sept. 22, 1863, in Nagyvarad, of a sudden heart attack less than three months after her father's death, according to her obituary. Two of her Gedeon brothers and two Gedeon sisters were still alive then, as was her husband Antal and their son Agoston, my great grandfather. One of her brothers, Ladislaus Gedeon's son Ferencz (Franz, Francis), was also a famous lawyer in Nagyvarad and the county's assessor at the time of his father's death and wrote a book about law, I discovered on the internet. He and his brothers Stephen and Gabor (Gabriel) also got the nobility title at the same time as their father. Gabor was a judge on the Court of Appeals in Budapest at the time of his father's death, according to the father's obituary notice.

But the story hadn't ended.

The heyday of Ladislaus or Laszlo Gedeon, my third great grandfather, was in the early and mid 19th century, nearly 200 years ago. Most people are long forgotten after that long a time. To my surprise, a 2007 book in Hungarian published by the Hungarian Coaches Association and posted on the internet titled "Coaches Code of Ethics" quoted a poem of my ancestor Gedeon. It was found by German genealogist Heinz Schleusener, an expert on the ethnic German region in southeastern Slovakia where Gedeon was born, who sent it to me.

The quoted Gedeon poem was taken from the 1823 poetry book for young people that the law professor wrote that was mentioned in the 1860 Budapest newspaper article about him. However, the poem reprinted in 2007 was aimed not at youth but at teachers. It praised the vocation of teaching of youth. It told teachers what a valuable treasure is entrusted into their hands and that they should guide wisely and set an example.

In Hungarian the poem, with apparently some lines cut so maybe it was an excerpt, read:

Már kedves tanítók'

Rátok bízza hazánk e kintes vagyonát,

kezetekbe adja legdrágább zálogját....

Vigyétek őket a virtus forrásához

s annak csörgedező arany patakjához....

a terhet vállokra olly böltsen rakjátok,

hogy erejek et meg ne tántorítsátok,...

És mivel reátok függesztik szemeket
az ifjak, s követik minden lépéteket,
ellőtök mindég olly példával mennyetek,
hogy ők ahoz szabvan tulajdon életek',
valami homályra ne akadhassanak,
s e'ként jobról balra ne tántorodjanak...

Gedeon Laszlo, 1823

My English translation (aided by Schleusener and his wife, Google translate and my parents' old Hungarian-English dictionary) is hopefully accurate. It reads:

To the dear teachers!
Your homeland entrusted you with a treasure;
you get in your hands the most valuable pawn....
Lead them to the source of virtue/valor
and its trickling stream of gold....
Put burdens wisely on their shoulders
so they do not totter....
And because the eyes of the youth
are on you, following each step,
always set a heavenly example
so that they find their own lives
in any haze they should encounter

and not vary from right to left....

Laszlo Gedeon, 1823

The 2007 book author thought the poem was as valid today for teachers and coaches as in 1823. That is quite a tribute to the man from the small town of Jaszo (Jasov/Joss), who moved beyond it in his career but apparently never lost his values.

I'm proud to have him as an ancestor.

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