

Mattersdorf, Hungary During Cholera, 1831–1832, And the 1836 Jewish Census Created in Its Wake

by Carole Garbuny Vogel

Dedicated to the memory of my friend Florence Warschawsky Harris of Lexington, Massachusetts, who died in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nearly 200 years ago, in 1826, a cholera pandemic broke out in India and spread across Asia to Europe and the Americas through trade routes. By 1831, it had reached the Austro-Hungarian Empire, bringing profuse diarrhea, vomiting, and leg cramps to the unlucky. In the most severe cases, death came from dehydration, sometimes within hours of the onset of symptoms. Most infected people, however, were asymptomatic or had mild symptoms.

Cholera spread by ingesting food or water contaminated by the fecal waste of an infected person. In overcrowded communities, such as Mattersdorf's Jewish quarter, the inhabitants drew their water for drinking, cooking, and wash-

1,073 attendees came from 17 countries... More than 250 volunteers and speakers produced an unprecedented 300 sessions.

ing, from shallow wells near outhouses. Spread of the disease was inevitable. The incubation period before the onset of symptoms ranged from twelve hours to five days. Carriers—infected people with no symptoms—were contagious for up to ten days, dumping the bacteria back into the environment where the germs could spread to others.¹

What can we learn about the impact of this pandemic and its aftermath on the Jewish communities of our ancestors? What percentage of the population did it kill? How did it affect individual families and the community at large?

I was surprised at how much detailed information I found to answer these questions for Mattersdorf, Hungary, (later, Mattersburg, Austria). In a history book written about Mattersburg, I discovered that the outbreak in Mattersdorf was blamed on a Jewish family of eight. The family had arrived on September 8, 1831, from Baden bei Wien, Austria, where cholera was rampant. Fearing contagion, the Christian court ruled that the family had to be isolated for eight days before they could settle in the Jewish quarter.²

I assume that the Baden family likely had residency rights in Mattersdorf. Why else would they flee there? At that time, the only Jewish Mattersdorf residents with permission to live in Baden were restaurant owner and caterer, Itzik Chaim Schischa (1768–1839), his wife Franziska (Fradel) née Löwell and their five unmarried children. The eighth person in their party was either a servant or less likely, Fradel's widowed sister Mathilde (Mottel) Gelles née Löwell, who also

had residency rights in Mattersdorf.^{3,4}

Cholera Breaks Out in Jewish Quarter

On September 16th or 17th, the family was permitted to move into the quarter. On September 27, cholera broke out inside the ghetto. The Christian authorities placed the entire Jewish community under quarantine. To ensure that no one entered or exited the quarantined Jewish enclave, the Christian government assigned one soldier and four or five civilians to guard the entrance. To help alleviate the suffering in the Jewish enclave, Christians in Mattersdorf collected bread, flour, potatoes, firewood, and money to buy other essential goods. They deposited these items at the house of the Christian *Marktrichter* (judge) who co-chaired the collection committee and dispensed the supplies to the Jewish quarter. The quarantine was partially lifted to allow the Jews to bury their dead. Bodies were brought out two or three at a time on a wagon and taken to the Jewish cemetery for burial.⁵

On October 14, the quarantine was lifted completely as cholera had broken out in the Christian part of town and so there was no point to it. The Christians were afraid to treat their own patients, as it was dangerous and many caregivers died. Jewish *Krankenwarter* (healthcare workers) were called in to nurse the ill. The Jewish caregivers cared for stricken Christians in neighboring villages, too.⁶ Cholera killed 134 Christians in Mattersdorf.⁷ Among the dead was the pastor who had co-chaired the committee to supply the quarantined Jews with food.⁸

The outbreak lasted until January 1832 in Mattersdorf with a death toll of 116 Jews.⁹ Twenty-one victims were buried in a mass grave. Later, a large monument engraved with their names was erected. The other 95 victims were interred individually or in small clusters. Their tombstones were lost when the Nazis destroyed the cemetery in 1942 and turned it into a park to commemorate the Third Reich. A picture of the monument remains, however. It appears in a history of Jewish Mattersdorf published in 1975.¹⁰

The cholera epidemic extracted a terrible toll on the community. Families who lost fathers now had no principal wage earner. The death of mothers left a terrible void for their children and in household management. Parents, siblings, and other family members mourned the loss of children whose lives were cut short. Jewish census records from 1836, 1838, and 1844 show that the economic consequences of the epidemic lasted most of the 1830s. Many men found it difficult to feed their families, let alone pay the tolerance taxes that they owed to the Austro-Hungarian emperor for the right to live in Hungary.¹¹

This loss of tax revenue was noted by the authorities. In



Cholera monument that was in Mattersdorf (today Mattersburg, Austria). Photograph made prior to 1938.

1836, the Royal Hungarian administration conducted a Jewish census—*Conscriptio Judaeorum*—to give an accounting of tolerance tax payments that were in arrears.

Conscriptio Judaeorum 1836 (Jewish Census of 1836)

The 1836 Jewish census is written in German, but to find it (and all the others for Mattersdorf), I needed to search using the Hungarian version of the town's name—*Nagy-marton*. I obtained digital scans of the census from the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives in Budapest, which has a collection of Sopron County Jewish censuses from the years 1830/31, 1836, and 1844.¹² The scans were made from black and white prints of the original censuses photographed in the 1930s.

The 1836 Jewish census was a survey of male taxpayers—both living and dead. This was clearly an unusual, augmented census. I had never seen dead people enumerated in a Hungarian Jewish census before.¹³ In Mattersdorf, 363 men were identified. They were listed by first name and family name, and the names were arranged somewhat alphabetically by first name. There were 103 dead men listed who still owed taxes and 260 living, of whom 219 resided in Mattersdorf. Only 42 (19 percent) of the men domiciled in Mattersdorf had paid their tolerance taxes in full, a reflection of the terrible post-epidemic economy. The other 81 percent could not raise the money.

The augmented census identified 23 men who had succumbed to cholera and 80 others who had died from unspecified causes. Unexpectedly, the cholera deaths constituted only 22 percent of the deceased taxpayers in the census.

I realized that something was wrong with the numbers. There were too many dead people in the census for the time frame and some of the living people listed had moved away

from the community years earlier. I realized that the 1836 census was not only an accounting of contemporary taxpayers but also a list of tax delinquents stretching back about 25 years.

A note immediately above the first line of the census supports my analysis of this augmented census: *Beschreibung deren in Mattersdorf Israelitischen Gemeinde bis eingeschlossen des Jahres 1828 restirender Toleranz Taxe.* (Description of the Outstanding Tolerance Tax Remaining in the Mattersdorf Jewish Community Up to and Including the Year 1828.)

I had become expert on the Jewish population of Mattersdorf and recognized that I could identify most of the men named in the document and determine the actual cholera death statistics. About 15 years ago, I had teamed up with my distant cousin, Rabbi Yitzchak Stroh, to see how far back we could take our family tree. Using a wide variety of sources including metrical records, burial society records, censuses, housing ledgers, synagogue seating plans, tax records and many other sources, we created family websites stretching from the 1600s to the present. The largest web contains nearly 15,000 people in 14 generations. Our research is detailed in “Constructing a Town-Wide Genealogy: Jewish Mattersdorf, Hungary 1698–1939,” published in AVOTAYNU in Spring 2007.

Rabbi Stroh and I identified the first 177 names (out of the 363) in the 1836 census as people who had resided in Mattersdorf in the early 1830s, including four who had died by 1836. For each man who owed money, a comment written in old German script appeared next to the amount owed. The comments provide an explanation for the lack of payment. Taken as a whole, the census paints a grim picture of the financial health of the individuals and their community. Here

are many examples:

Because of long illness without earnings, totally impoverished
Because of many children to care for and low earnings, totally without means
A mouse-poor mending tailor
Stricken with epilepsy, hardly capable of supporting his small children
Small children to support
Hardly capable of supporting himself, robbed of his wealth by calamities
Totally without means, has to feed many children
Totally without means because of old age and sickliness
Peddler has to support old parents
Without means because of foreclosure
Because of poverty is supported by others
Chronic illness and many children
Poor and old, no support for family
Peddler, can hardly earn the daily [necessities]
Encumbered by large and multiple debts
Because of debilitating diseases completely impoverished
The whole family is supported by others
Impoverished and sickly all the time
Many debts and impending foreclosure
Much illness without income, completely impoverished
Impoverished because of prolonged ill health of his relatives
Beggar, is supported by others
Poor, the foreclosure by the court did not find any funds either
Because of support for his destitute sick parents and feeding many children, cannot pay at all
Blind, has support from others
Prolonged costly family illnesses have impoverished him
Supporting his parents and many children eats up the income
Very old with a sickly family, now entirely impoverished
Entirely penniless and old
Ruined financially by trade
Hardly capable to maintain his house
Indebted, totally penniless
Very old, already retired
No wealth
A coachman totally ruined financially
Even the wealthiest man in town could not pay his full share of the tolerance tax. Gabriel Trebitsch owed 102 florin but it was noted that he “promises to pay 30 florin, declares himself incapable [to pay] the rest of the sum.”

The next 162 people listed were a mix of impoverished taxpayers residing in Mattersdorf, living taxpayers who had moved away and 77 men who had died poor. Most of the last had succumbed to unspecified causes:

Very old and dead
Died in poverty
Died old and poor
Died poor in Vienna
Died, old children’s teacher
Dead, his family helpless

Forty-one living taxpayers had moved away. Ten lived in unknown locales, 29 had new identified residences and two had been baptized. Of the men with known residences, only two lived in Vienna, and none in Budapest, the two largest cities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Most lived in towns that are in northwestern Hungary today, such as Beled,

Mihályi, Nemeskér and Veszvény, or in locales in Burgenland (the easternmost state of Austria), such as Eisenberg, Gattendorf, Kobersdorf, Neudörfl and Rechnitz. Some people settled farther afield, such as Baden in Lower Austria, Pressburg (now Bratislava, Slovakia), and Szemere in north-eastern Hungary. Sometimes, the passage of time was noted:
moved two years ago
lived since a long time in...
moved away 12 years ago

One of the two Jews who had been baptized left the Jewish community in 1819 without paying his back taxes and his whereabouts were unknown; the other was still paying incrementally on his delinquent tolerance taxes. The 1836 census also documented the failure of one community member to make a fresh start elsewhere: “Joachim Schey Kohn moved to Croatia and came back many years ago without wealth.” The census also provided the occupations of a few men who had left town—notably those in the food industry (caterers and confectioners).

Thirteen of the dead people in the 1836 census had died outside of the community—ten in Vienna, plus one each in Croatia; Gorizia, Italy; and a place nebulously described as “foreign lands.” The names of the men who died in Vienna did not appear in the GenTeam index of death records from the *Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien* (Vienna Jewish community). Since the names are not in the Vienna death ledgers, it is not possible to determine if cholera was the cause of death.

In the 1836 census, nearly all the cholera deaths of male taxpayers were clustered together near the end of the document. Each had the same notation after his name: *Starb ohne Vermögen* in Cholera. (Died from cholera without wealth.)

Eight living people were grouped at the bottom of the census as an addendum. Six of the names had appeared earlier and the amount owed on their tolerance taxes had been changed. Two new names had been added.

When I finished analyzing the 1836 census data, I compared it to the 1828 Hungarian Property Tax census and I found substantial differences in the data.

1828 Hungarian Property Tax Census

The 1828 Hungarian Property Tax Census, known as *Vagyonösszeírás 1828*, was recorded by the Hungarian government in Latin and provides an accounting of real estate holders and their taxable property in all counties. Their tenants were not identified by name, although the number of tenants and subtenants was noted. A good description of the census, written by Eric M. Bloch, may be found in the JewishGen Hungarian Database.¹⁴ The original census records are housed in Budapest at the National Archive of Hungary. Digitized scans of the census can be accessed at Family Search.org.

In the 1828 Property Tax Census, the Jewish community of Mattersdorf immediately followed the Christian community of Mattersdorf. There were 250 identified Jewish heads

of household—male and female. The 228 male householders were listed by first name and surname (not patronymic). The 18 widowed female Jewish householders were identified with the title *Vid.* (the abbreviation for *Vidua*, the Latin term for widow) and either their own first name or their husband's, followed by the husband's surname. There were also four female Jewish householders who presumably had never been married. They were listed by first name and patronymic. The householders were arranged by street address, although this was not stated in the census. (Rabbi Stroh and I have documented home ownership in Jewish Mattersdorf from the early 1730s through about 1820, with large gaps, but we had enough information to determine that the 1828 census was conducted from house to house.)

The Mattersdorf 1828 property census included 171 unnamed Jewish tenants, who presumably were heads of households in their own separate rented unit. (The feudal lord had prohibited the Jews from erecting new houses or renting space in the Christian sector, so the Mattersdorf Jews were squeezed into the existing housing stock, which consisted of two-story apartment buildings of various sizes. Men were prohibited from marrying until they acquired their own apartment with a kitchen. Numerous records document how the buildings were subdivided repeatedly over the years and additions were tacked on.) This census also accounted for 49 subtenants who were likely unmarried or widowed boarders who shared the same living space as the homeowner. The gender distribution of these additional 220 adults is unknown but they brought the total of adults in the 1828 census up to 470. Some of the boarders may have been male students in the Mattersdorf yeshiva who came from out of town. The number of yeshiva students fluctuated from about 20 to 40 each year, but some were Mattersdorf residents who lived with their families. Missing from the census tally was the number of spouses, unmarried children, and servants living in each home.

A close comparison of the 1828 and 1836 censuses revealed that at least nine of the impoverished dead men listed in 1836 had died before 1828; their widows appeared in the 1828 census. We know from other sources that some of the men died before 1815. Likely, the long-deceased were listed in 1836 because their families had been too poor to pay off their tolerance tax debt. Debts were passed onto the deceased's widow, sons, and sometimes, sons-in-law and brothers.

Conscriptio Judaeorum 1830/31 **(Jewish Census of 1830/31)**

The 1830/31 Jewish census was completed shortly before the cholera epidemic. It was recorded in Latin and identified 206 male heads of household and 18 widowed female heads of household for a total of 224. This was a decrease of 26 households from the 1828 Property Tax Census. What had happened? At least 10 male heads of household who were listed in the 1828 census had died before the 1830/31 census was taken, as did some of the widows.



Cholera memorial in Baden bei Wien, Austria

This census also provided the number of sons, daughters, other relatives, and servants (if any) for each household, for a total of 1,106 people.¹⁵ The census categorized heads of households by profession—merchants, officials, peddlers, artisans, and leaseholders. The vast majority of Mattersdorf men were classified as peddlers. This census also provided the yearly tax assessment. If a person was in dire straits and supported by others, an explanation was noted. For example:

- Blind and poor
- Broken strength, receives charity
- Because of advanced age lives on the support of others
- Apoplexy [stroke] lives on charity
- Deaf and weak

Fifty-six heads of households—25 percent of the people listed—were living in poverty even before the cholera epidemic struck.

The wealthiest person in the community, the rabbi, Mayer Popper, was not included in the 1836 census. The second wealthiest was Rosalia Trebitsch who was widowed about 1829. Her deceased husband, Moshe Löbl Trebitsch, appeared in the 1836 census with the notation, *died poor without wealth and was heavily in debt*. Initially, I wondered if the Trebitsches were tax evaders. Then Rabbi Stroh reminded me that the couple had been wealthy enough to participate in the regional private banking system where individual lenders loaned money directly to borrowers. The loans

were secured with collateral and/or promissory notes, and they crossed religious lines. Jews loaned money to Christians and Jews. Sometimes the borrowers defaulted on their loans. If the defaulting borrower was a powerful non-Jew, there sometimes was little recourse.

At the time of Moshe Löbl's death, most of the family's money likely was tied up in loans made to others. The community did not take this into consideration when assessing their wealth and setting their tax rate. So even though the Trebitsches were rich on paper (promissory notes), they were cash poor. My article, "Anchoring the Schischa Family Firmly in Austro-Hungarian History During the 1600s" gives two examples of wealthy Mattersdorf Jews who had debtors default on their loans (AVOTAYNU, Spring 2019, pp. 18–19).

The 1830–1831 Jewish census in Mattersdorf did not include the dead or people who resided in other places unlike the later 1836 census.

Why were individuals who lived in other places included in the 1836 Mattersdorf census?

The answer has to do with *Heimatrecht* (right of domicile). The *Heimat*—home community—was obligated to provide accommodation and care for its poor and sick members unable to care for themselves. It was difficult to transfer *Heimatrecht* unless one was quite wealthy or married into another community. At the time of the 1836 census, many of the men who had left Mattersdorf retained their *Heimatrecht* in the Jewish community, but neglected to pay their share of taxes.

Hapsburg rulers did not collect tolerance taxes individually from each taxpayer. Instead, the Jewish community was assessed a head tax for each community member and expected to pay the taxes in a lump sum. Thus, the Jewish community government had the responsibility of paying the taxes of the missing men, so it recorded them in their books.

Conclusion

At first, the death toll from cholera seemed to be 22 percent of the dead male householders listed in the census. After correlating the data with prior censuses, metrical records, and other sources, I verified that a substantial number of the other deaths had occurred outside that time frame. Of the 103 deaths listed in the 1836 census, 64 were the deaths of delinquent taxpayers. These taxpayers had died in the years prior to the pandemic, stretching possibly as far back as 1810 or so.¹⁶ Eleven of the deaths in the census occurred after the pandemic had run its course. It appears that only 28 heads of households had died during the period of the pandemic, of which 23 succumbed to cholera. Thus, about 82 percent of the male householder deaths in Mattersdorf in 1831 and 1832 were due to cholera.

I also deduced from the census data and the death records from January 1833 to mid-February 1836 (when the census was completed) that 258 male householders were living in Mattersdorf at the start of the pandemic. Even though only 8.9 percent of the male householders had died of cholera, the entire community was badly affected. The poverty rate had

jumped from 25 percent in 1831 to 81 percent in the aftermath of the epidemic.

Notes

1. "Cholera." World Health Organization online
2. Paul, Hans. *50 Jahre Stadtgemeinde Mattersburg* (Stadt Mattersburg, 1976), pp. 72–73.
3. Schärf, Thomas E. *Jüdisches Leben in Baden: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Jewish Life in Baden: From Its Early Beginning until the Present) Wien: Mandelbaum Verlag 2005, pp. 30–32.
4. Isak Schyscha census entry. *Conscriptio Judaeorum 1836, Nagymarton, #278*; owed 68 gulden 20 kreuzer n tolerance taxes. *Ist Traitteur in Baden längerer Zeit; ob er auch zahlbar ist, kann die –emeinde nicht wissen.* (Is caterer in Baden for a long time. If he is able to pay, the community cannot know.)
5. Paul, Hans. *50 Jahre Stadtgemeinde Mattersburg* pp. 72–73
6. *Ibid.*
7. Paul, Hans. *Mattersburg in alten Ansichten*. Europäische Bibliothek (1980), in the introduction the author wrote that cholera killed many Jews and 134 Christians. Note: In Hans Paul's earlier book, *50 Jahre Stadtgemeinde Mattersburg*, he gave the total death count of Christian and Jew as 62. CGV believes that the book published in 1980 reflects a more accurate number of Christian deaths.
8. Paul, Hans. *50 Jahre Stadtgemeinde Mattersburg*.
9. Hodik, Fritz P., *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mattersdorfer Judengemeinde im 18. und in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Eisenstadt, Austria: Burgenländische Forschungen, 1975), p. 285, showed 21 victims. The Hebrew inscription notes that an additional 95 had also died from cholera and were buried nearby.
10. *Ibid.* p. 285. Photo of mass grave.
11. The Tolerance Tax was instituted in 1746, by Empress Maria Theresia of Austria and was an onerous tax in normal times.
12. The archive may hold these censuses from other parts of Hungary, but during this time of COVID-19 pandemic the archive has been closed and my emails have gone unanswered.
13. Dead people were mentioned in the 1738 and 1744 Hungarian Jewish censuses in relation to property inheritance and transfers but they were not enumerated.
14. Bloch, Eric M. "The 1828 Hungarian Property Tax Census Database." JewishGen. <https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Hungary/census1828.htm>.
15. The 1830 census of Mattersdorf Jews identified 206 male heads of household and 18 female widowed heads of household. For each family, the number of children, other relatives, and servants (if any) was tallied, for a total population of 1,106 Jews in Mattersdorf.
16. There was a note immediately above the first line of the census that supports my conclusion that this was an augmented census: *Beschreibung deren in Mattersdorf Israelitischen Gemeinde bis eingeschlossen des Jahres 1828 restirender Toleranz Taxe.* (Description of the Outstanding Tolerance Tax Remaining in the Mattersdorf Jewish Community Up to and Including the Year 1828.)

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