

THE RESILIENCE CHAPTER

Steve Fedak

Born in a Catholic village in imperial Galicia, Steve Fedak crossed into an American working life shaped by war, epidemic, depression, and the destruction of his Polish homeland, then spent his last decades in Carnegie, Pennsylvania, with Anna and their four sons.

The World ♦ The Years ♦ What Remained

One ancestor. A life measured by what it endured.

Origentum

YOUR HISTORY, INTERPRETED.

LIFE & ERA RECORD

ANCESTOR	Steve Fedak
LIFE SPAN	1892–1977
BIRTHPLACE	Bednarka
PRIMARY HARDSHIP	The Russian Pogroms
EVENTS WOVEN	The Russian Pogroms, World War I, The Holocaust, World War II

*A life is not only what happened to it — it is
what went on being lived through what
happened.*

The World He Entered

A Village Under an Empire

Steve Fedak was born in 1892 in Bednarka, a rural Catholic community in the Polish lands then governed by Austria-Hungary. Poland did not exist as an independent state that year. Bednarka lay in Galicia, an imperial border region where village life depended largely on farming, seasonal work, and ties among church, household, and neighbors. The Catholic calendar ordered much of communal time, while imperial officials and distant rulers set the legal terms under which families lived.

The surviving family account does not name Steve's parents or identify any brothers and sisters. His place within the birth order is therefore unknown. What can be said is narrower but firm: he entered a Polish Catholic household in Bednarka in 1892, and the name by which his American descendants knew him was Steve Fedak. The records supplied here do not establish whether an earlier Polish form of his given name appeared at baptism or on immigration papers.

His parents' own recent history is also undocumented. They belonged, however, to a generation living under foreign rule in an economically strained part of Austria-Hungary. Rural households in Galicia commonly divided small holdings among heirs or sought wages beyond the village. When land could no longer support every son and daughter, temporary labor and overseas migration became practical household choices rather than abstract ambitions.

Farther east and north, another form of danger marked these same decades. Anti-Jewish pogroms swept parts of the Russian Empire from 1881 to 1884, before Steve's birth, and again from 1903 to 1906, during his childhood. These attacks were directed at Jewish communities. Bednarka was not Kishinev, Odessa, or a documented site of the pogroms, and the historical record provided here does not place Steve or his household within them. Their proper place in his story is as part of the wider instability of Eastern Europe, not as an experience that can be assigned to him.

The distinction matters. In Kishinev in 1903, 49 people were killed and about 500 were injured. In Odessa in 1905, roughly 400 people were killed. Those figures belong to the attacked communities and to the historical record of the pogroms; they do not describe Bednarka or Steve's family. What the pogrom era demonstrates is that the eastern half of Europe in which Steve grew up was divided not only by imperial borders but also by unequal citizenship, organized violence, and pressures that sent many people abroad for very different reasons.

By Steve's youth, emigration had become a familiar feature of Galician life. The date of his own departure is not present in the family facts, so neither the route nor the immediate cause should be invented. His later life establishes that he reached the United States and worked there as a laborer. The move carried him from a small Catholic village under the Habsburg crown to the industrial world of western Pennsylvania, where work was paid in wages and could disappear with a shutdown, a market collapse, or a war.

DID YOU KNOW?

When Steve was born in Bednarka in 1892, Poland was absent from the political map. His region belonged to Austria-Hungary until the empire collapsed at the end of World War I.

“The victims of the pogroms belong at the center of that history; their numbers cannot be turned into an experience assigned to Steve.”

A Life Under Pressure

Work Between Wars and Loss

THE EVENT AT THE CENTER

The Russian Pogroms

The pogrom era continued into Steve's early adulthood, but its last and deadliest phase unfolded well east of Bednarka. During the civil wars of 1918–1921, pogroms in Ukraine killed an estimated 50,000 to 200,000 Jewish people. The victims were members of Jewish communities targeted amid military and political collapse. No evidence in the supplied record connects Steve personally to those attacks, and no such connection should be presumed. By 1918, at age twenty-six, he was living in the United States and working as a laborer.

That location changed the pressures upon him. America entered World War I in 1917, and by the following year military demand, inflation, labor shortages, and government controls had altered industrial work. As a laborer in 1918, Steve would have worked within that wartime economy, though his employer and exact trade are not recorded. The conflict caused about 17 million military and civilian deaths worldwide, a global figure that describes the war rather than

Steve's community or household. When the armistice came in November 1918, he was still a young immigrant worker earning his place through physical labor.

The influenza pandemic reached the United States in force during that same year. Steve's record does not document illness in his household, and no local figure has been established for his address at the time. For laboring families, closures, interrupted shifts, and sickness among coworkers could reduce wages even when a household escaped bereavement. Those were common material risks in 1918, but the evidence does not show which of them entered Steve's home.

At some point, Steve married Anna Fedak. Their marriage year is not preserved in the supplied family account, so it cannot be fitted artificially between the dated public events. Together they had four sons: Andrew, John, Walter, and Michael. Their names provide the clearest measure of the private life that continued beside the public crises. Wages had to cover food, rent or housing costs, clothing, and the needs of four growing boys, while the available record continued to identify their father simply and plainly as a laborer.

In 1929, when Steve was about thirty-seven, the stock market crash opened a long economic collapse. The record does not state that he lost a job, missed rent, or received relief. It does establish that he depended on labor for his living, which placed the family close to the movement of the job market. During the Great Depression, a household supported by manual wages would have had

less income when shifts were cut or hiring stopped; any effect on the Fedak household beyond that general exposure remains undocumented.

The crash was followed by years in which industrial communities across western Pennsylvania faced unemployment and irregular work. If Steve was already in the Carnegie area during those years, he would have lived in a place tied to the Pittsburgh district's mills, rail lines, construction, and service work, but his address and employer have not been established for that period. The family account supplies the occupation "laborer," not a mill, union, crew, or company. That limit is important: his working life was physical and wage-based, but its daily setting is still unknown.

In 1939, at age forty-seven, Steve was living in the United States with Anna and their sons when Germany invaded Poland and World War II began. Bednarka, the village named in his birth record, belonged by then to an independent Poland that had existed for only two decades. The invasion again placed his birthplace under occupying power. The supplied evidence does not identify relatives who remained there, correspondence that crossed the Atlantic, or direct losses within the wider Fedak family.

The German occupation of Poland formed part of the setting in which the Holocaust was carried out. Six million Jewish people were murdered across Europe, including about three million Jewish citizens of Poland. These are facts about the victims and the crime, not measures of Steve's personal experience. No document supplied here places him at a particular demonstration, relief effort, or exchange of news. During these years he remained a Polish-born

laborer in the United States, while the country of his birth was occupied and its Jewish communities were systematically destroyed.

World War II also reordered American work. After Pearl Harbor in December 1941, when Steve was forty-nine, the United States mobilized factories, transportation networks, and construction crews for war. A laborer could encounter longer hours, movement between jobs, wage controls, rationing, and shortages, depending on his trade. The records do not say which of those changes applied to Steve. What they do show is that Anna, Andrew, John, Walter, and Michael formed the household against which any such change had to be managed.

By the war's end in 1945, Steve was fifty-three. The worldwide conflict had killed an estimated 70 to 85 million people, a global measure that must not be mistaken for the history of his Pennsylvania town. In Steve's own documented timeline, the secure facts are more modest: he had passed from young immigrant worker to middle-aged husband and father while two world wars, a pandemic, and an economic depression altered the conditions surrounding wage labor.

The decades after 1945 remain thinly documented. There is no recorded personal catastrophe, property loss, or workplace injury in the material provided, and absence from this account should not be turned into an event. Steve continued into old age, ultimately living to eighty-five. His death in Carnegie in 1977 fixes the final place in a life that began 4,000 miles away, in a village that had belonged to another empire and another political map.

THE EVENT, IN NUMBERS

Three major waves: 1881–1884, 1903–1906 (Kishinev 1903: 49 dead, 500 injured; Odessa 1905: ~400 dead), 1918–1921 (Ukraine: 50,000–200,000 Jews killed in pogroms during Civil War).

These are the event's recorded figures — not this family's.

“Wages had to cover food, housing, clothing, and the needs of four growing boys, while the record identified their father simply as a laborer.”

DID YOU KNOW?

The Russian pogroms were organized or tolerated attacks directed against Jewish communities, chiefly within the Russian Empire and later in the lands torn by civil war. Kishinev recorded 49 deaths in 1903, while roughly 400 people were killed in Odessa in 1905; neither figure describes Bednarka or Steve's household.

What the Years Made

The Measure of Ordinary Continuance

Steve Fedak's known family can be named without qualification. His wife was Anna Fedak. Their four sons were Andrew, John, Walter, and Michael. The marriage date and the sons' birth years are not present in the supplied record, but the family structure itself is established: two parents and four boys joined by the Fedak name in the United States.

Steve lived from 1892 to 1977, a span of eighty-five years. He was born under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, lived to see Poland restored and invaded, and died during the Cold War. In the United States he was known by an occupation that covered many kinds of hard physical work: laborer. The exact worksite is missing, but the nature of the livelihood is not. His household depended on what his work could earn.

Set beside the large events, the documented life is made of steady facts rather than grand claims. In 1918, at twenty-six, Steve was an immigrant laborer as war and influenza disrupted American life. By 1939, at forty-seven, he was living in the United States with his family as war returned to Poland. He later reached old age in Carnegie, the western Pennsylvania community named as his place of death.

Descendants of wage-earning immigrant families shaped by depression and wartime shortage often find practical habits passed down without a written expla-

nation: food kept rather than wasted, money held for an uncertain week, repairs made before replacements were bought, and work discussed in terms of whether it was available. The surviving Fedak facts do not prove that each custom belonged to Steve. They give his descendants a grounded place to look for such patterns: a laborer's income, four sons to support, the Depression in middle adulthood, and war in both his birthplace and adopted country.

Catholic identity offers another possible line of recognition, though the record does not describe Steve's personal practice. In Bednarka, Catholic parish life commonly marked baptisms, marriages, funerals, feast days, and the calendar of the village. Polish Catholic immigrants in Pennsylvania often rebuilt those ties through parish churches and ethnic neighborhoods. Whether Steve did so in a particular parish remains to be documented; his stated religion connects the village of his birth to the communities in which many immigrants made homes in America.

There are also silences that belong to this family history. Steve's parents and siblings are unnamed. His immigration year, marriage date, employer, and the birth years of Andrew, John, Walter, and Michael are absent. No record here identifies relatives caught in occupied Poland or assigns the suffering of Jewish victims to his biography. Keeping those boundaries does not lessen his story. It shows where family knowledge is firm and where later research must begin.

What remains is a clear human scale: Steve and Anna raised Andrew, John, Walter, and Michael on the earnings of a laborer; Steve's adult years crossed war, epidemic, economic collapse, and another war; and he lived until 1977. His answer to those years is found not in a claim about what he thought, but in the life

the record can still name—work, marriage, fatherhood, and eighty-five years between Bednarka and Carnegie.

“His answer to those years is found not in a claim about what he thought, but in the life the record can still name.”

CONSIDER THE ARC

Steve Fedak's life unfolded across a century marked by upheaval, from his birth in 1892 in Bednarka, Poland, through the challenges of immigration to the United States, and into the laboring life he embraced in Carnegie, Pennsylvania. He navigated significant global events such as World War I, the 1918 flu pandemic, and the economic strains of the Great Depression, all while raising a family with his wife Anna and their four sons. The story of his endurance is one of survival and adaptation amidst the pressures of a changing world, encapsulating the experiences of many immigrant laborers of his time.



Steve Fedak left only a spare outline in the present record, but its fixed points are substantial: Bednarka, Anna, Andrew, John, Walter, Michael, a laborer's work, and Carnegie at the end.

Questions for You

What they lived through belongs to history. These questions belong to you.

REFLECTION

The chapter describes Steve's early life in Bednarka amid the Russian Pogroms. Have you explored local historical records or archives that might shed light on the experiences of Polish immigrants during this period?

REFLECTION

Steve's life as a laborer during economic downturns like the Great Depression raises questions about financial habits. Does your family still practice any traditions related to saving or resourcefulness that may have originated from his experiences?

REFLECTION

Steve worked as a laborer to support his family through numerous global crises. In what ways have you found yourself balancing work and personal challenges in your own life?

Where to Look Next

Specific records and archives worth pursuing to carry this research further.

1

Find A Grave search for Steve Fedak, 1977 — This resource may provide additional context about Steve's life and legacy, including possible family connections and biographical details that could enrich your understanding of his story.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/search?>

[firstname=Steve&lastname=Fedak&deathyear=1977](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/search?firstname=Steve&lastname=Fedak&deathyear=1977)

2

VA Gravesite Locator for Steve Fedak — If Steve served in the military, this locator can confirm his burial site and provide insight into his service, which could be relevant to understanding his life during wartime. <https://gravelocator.cem.va.gov/ngl/?>

[L=Fedak&F=Steve](https://gravelocator.cem.va.gov/ngl/?L=Fedak&F=Steve)

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This chapter was researched and written drawing on what the records preserve and what the absences imply. It honors a life measured by what it endured — informed interpretation, not a vital record.

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