

## Chirurgus [Surgeon] Johannes Muehlecker 1720-1778

Waiting for a little medical story in the style of “General Hospital?” I am sorry to disappoint you. Our Chirurgus Johannes Muehlecker from Geradstetten was not a famous surgeon, rather a simple *Bader* [literally “bather,” barber, bathhouse proprietor] who, with permission, cut hair, cupped, or pulled aching teeth for his fellow townspeople. [“Cupped” refers to the application of cups for suction, a traditional healing technique, said to improve circulation.] Basically, he was a poor wretch with a large brood of children to raise, who accordingly had debts like –forgive the expression—a swineherd.

He called himself Chirurgus [Surgeon], a designation that has nothing to do with the present day word. He never saw a University. In old records the occupation would be known as *Barbierer*, *Medicaster* or *Wundarzt* [barber, ..., wound doctor]. One was happy to have such a person in the area, even if his medical knowledge was not very advanced. But our Johannes Muehlecker had even passed a test before a Duchy board chaired by a physician, a real medical doctor. And because of this he was authorized to carry a staff or sword, a privilege accorded to no others than the mayor and members of the town council.

How did I discover this Johannes Muehlecker? Had he lived a settled, proper life, we would know little of him. Unfortunately, the opposite was the case. Because of this the Geradstetten authorities were always busy dealing with him. The schoolmaster Georg Michael Mayerlin, who had to keep the proceedings of the court, wrote his fingers sore, as in many transaction of the Geradstetten courts, our chirurgus played the infamous main role. And whenever I paged through these old records, the name Muehlecker passed before my eyes.

Take a look back for a moment at the town of Geradstetten in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The approximately 800 inhabitants lived under crowded conditions, often three or four families under one roof, many women sharing one kitchen. Gossip and town chatter were the order of the day, as the records constantly attest. The personal freedoms of the townspeople were as hemmed in as the living conditions. All aspects of town life were watched over by the authorities, the civil ones by the major and town council, the spiritual by the pastor and the church court.

When Johannes Muehlecker once again had occasion to come before the court, he had to deal with Mayor Johann Simon Lederer\*. The Family Lederer was an entire mayoral dynasty, serving in an unbroken line, 1674-1860, six in a row. The young Muehlecker couple were married by Pastor Phil. Jakob Stoeltzel, whose daughter was the godmother of several of their children. Muehlecker saved the main grief for Pastor Joh. C. Sigelin, in office from 1757 on, who on more than one occasion read him the *Liveten* [book of Leviticus, moral legislation].

## His Life

He was not born in Geradstetten. His father was *Buerger* and *Sattlermeister* [citizen and sadler] of Ebersbach on the Fils, where he [our chirurg] was born in 1720. Presumably he went to Latin school before he completed an apprenticeship with the Chirurg Sartorius from 1736-1739. Then he moved to foreign lands, completing four journeyman years in Liestal by Basel. In the spring of 1743 he presented himself to the examination committee for chirurgen in Stuttgart, so as to become an independent practitioner.

Only a quarter-year later his name appeared in the local [Geradstetten] marriage records of 1652, having married a Geradstetten vineyardman's daughter at the age of 23. The then Pastor M. Stoeltzel noted:

*Anno 1743: Nomina Neogamorum 30 July*

*Johannes Muehlecker, Barbier, surviving legitimate son of Daniel Muehlecker, sadler and citizen of Ebersbach, mother Anna Maria, born Bader. Maria Catherina, legitimate daughter of Joh. Jacob Hecken, vineyardman and citizen here.*

A year later the first son, Joh. Gottfried was born. He is said to later have followed professionally in his father's footsteps and worked until the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as Chirurg in Geradstetten. Six further children were born in the span to 1755

*1745 Johannes*  
*1748 Johannes Friderich*  
*1749 Christina Catharina*  
*1751 Sophia Dorothea*  
*1754 Friderica*  
*1755 Friderica Magdalena*

The son Johannes only lived to age one, and the daughter Friderica died a few days after birth, but the others survived to adulthood. They apparently married outside of the town as their names do not appear again in the church book. The oldest daughter appeared against her father in the church court proceedings. He refused to give her permission to marry a Stuttgarter tailor's son, even though she was already 25 years old!

As he lived in the area, he was allowed to help his fellow Geradstetten townspeople with simple health problems. This did not bring much in by the way of earnings, as he was not the only Chirurg in the town. He worked alongside his older colleague Johann Adam Krayl, and in the 1750's the Chirurg Johannes Knauss as well. The later seems to have moved away from town. It is no wonder since Muehlecker was in constant conflict with him. All over the state the chirurgen competed for the meager earnings that their craft garnered.

## His Profession

What exactly was his profession? He was certainly not a doctor as we currently use the word. Scientifically trained doctors existed, if at all, only in the cities. The farmers in the country however rarely sought after their services, for the most part because they could not pay the rates. One rather consulted the *Chirurgus, Medicaster*, wound doctor or *Skarificant (Schoepfer, cupper)* as they were known in the old records. These people lived in town. One was acquainted with them.

Already in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the Bader, Barbierer or Chirurgen had their own guild regulations. The training with study times, journeyman times, multi-year travel internships, and master examinations for sworn-in, certified Chirurgen were written down in detail. The journeyman years were served by many in the military as “*Feldschers*” [field surgeons].

The guild book for Stuttgart exists for us today. It contains the test proceedings of our Johannes Muehlaecker, this time spelled with [a-umlaut] ae. His marks were not outstanding, and thus he was not allowed to take on an apprentice.

*Stuttgart 8 April 1734*

*Hearing by the local College of Medicine and Chirurgie.*

*Johann Muehlaecker, Scarifant born in Eberspach, Goeppingen district, age 23. Father Daniel Muehlaecker, citizen and sadler in that locale. Studied in Eberspach with H. Chirurgo Sartorio from 1736 to 1739. After apprenticeship with H. Chirurgo...went to Liehstal in Switzerland, Basel area for one year. Then served over two years under Chirurgo Giessin in that location. Total of four years.*

*Wants to settle in Winderspach in Schorndorf district, has for the previous journeyman years received Majorentatis credit from the princely R. Rath, to be admitted into examination. In exams he achieved mediocre marks in theory as well as practice, and thus on this basis he is not allowed to take apprentices until he again presents himself for re-examination.*

*Praesentes Medici*

*Chirurgi praesentes*

He received dispensation from his journeyman years presumably because they were fulfilled in Basel. His examination board included two fully qualified doctors, among them Dr. Bilfinger, the court physician of Duke Carl Eugen.

Most sicknesses were treated in these days with bloodletting, purgatives, and by inducing vomiting. Our Chirurgus also must have used these therapies. Alongside these he certainly was skilled in the use of medicinal plants. His prescription of “wild plum flower” waters gives proof to this. When all else failed, the farmers listened as well to the advice of shepards passing through town, to be had for a few Kreuzer. And the record speaks also a bit of the use of “superstition fever medicine [*aberglaeubischer Fiebermittel*], coffin nails, and related practices.

Internal sickness could not be treated by the Chirurg, this being the right of the academically trained doctors. But the Chirurges did this anyway, and were punished by the Duchy authorities when this became public. This called for statements of censure from the Duke. Of course, these did little good, as the village druggist was grateful to fill prescriptions under the counter, the two men happy to give each other a helping hand. From shaving and cupping alone, Johannes Muehlecker could hardly raise a family, even when he tended a vineyard and farmed a field on the side.

Chirurgus Krayl was responsible for healing the poor of the town in desperate circumstances. The costs had to be assumed by the "Heilige," the church treasury. That one felt community responsibility for these people becomes clear from this small entry in the church court proceedings.

*Actum d. 20 Dec 1770*

*By citation, H. Chirurgus Krayl appeared who was challenged, was he able to help the seven year old son of Gerhard Heck's widow, who could not hold his water, and had to run urgently three times or more in an hour. H. Krayl listened to the report; he would begin a cure with the boy, continue with it, and by showing, give him lessons, and then report back to the court.*

But back to Johannes Muehlecker. A few episodes from his life should add color. For sources we first use the records in the censure-reprimand book, next the notes of the town council, and of the church court.

The Overseer and Censure Court [*Vogt- und Ruggergericht*] was an old Wuerttemberg establishment from the year 1495. Each year the district overseer from Schorndorf came to Geradstetten to hold the censure court (*Ruge kommt von ruegen* [=censure]). It was connected with the inherited homage paid to the young nobles of the Duke's court. Every buerger had to appear and at this time could make oral complaints against the authorities or the townspeople. The censure courts handled everything from the neighbor's goose trampling your garden to criminal acts. Most cases were decided on the spot, indicated "Decision" in the proceedings.

At the onset, let me say that what we learn about Muehlecker is not all that pleasant, as he was no paragon of virtue. Apparently he had an easily irritated nature, was prone to disputes, and always fell into quarrels with his fellow town's people.

These disputes, often self-provoked, were sketched vividly in the proceedings. We should look behind the details, into the interesting background of village life of these times.

### **Johannes Muehlecker, Hitzkopf [Hothead]**

It was in January of 1760. The 22<sup>nd</sup>. The case begins, complaint of Chirurg Krail against his colleague Muehlecker. Krail and a young fellow were standing night watch when

they heard singing at 11 o'clock in the area. As a result, a brawl erupted with Muehlecker:

***Q. D. B. V.***

*Quon Deus Bene Vertat*

*Was Gott zum Guten Wenden wolle*

*Below, on the 8,9, and 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1760 session of the overseer's censure court, the following complaints came up, decided as indicated below by the high office and censure court, to wit Johann Adam Krail, Chirurg, complains that on the last Johannes holiday he had watch duty, and as he left his post at 11 o'clock, Chirurg Muehlecker searched him out 'pro subito' in a drunken state and attempted to join him. As he continued with his complaint, he Krail asked how it is we have the watch together, and Muehlecker answered, indeed I have the watch today, but whether they both have the watch together, he does not know. In the meanwhile, as Krail knew that Muehlecker was his mortal enemy, and he should not get into an argument with him in this intoxicated state, so he reached to open the watch shack door to let Muehlecker in, to avoid a confrontation.*

*However! Barely had he opened the door, when Muehlecker had him by the hair, threw him on the ground, choked him, and beat his face with his fists so that blood immediately flowed. He is a 60 year old man, and if help had not come immediately he certainly would have been choked to death. What he related here is the whole truth, to which the bailiff A. Michel, Michel Seybold's 16 yearold son, and the watchmaster Jerg Michael Mayerlin could attest, pleased to be heard according to the courts desires and procedures.*

*As this complaint was put to Muehlecker, he answered that Krail had several weeks prior, in Albert Waldenmeyer's Crown Inn, abused him with words and deeds, without the slightest reason, so that he shamed himself, and an older man should know better. Krail was armed with a stick and struck Muehlecker on his shoulder with such force that if the blow had hit his head, he would be deader than a door mouse. And as Muehlecker only wanted to answer Krail, and declare his innocence, Krail indecently reproached him, and told him he should just shut up, he was as ill reputed as a Maentelens Kreuzer .*

*And after that he complained that on the Johannes holiday he came upon Krail in the watch shack, and Krail again expressed his vindictive nature, and laid on him indecent words in great quantity, so that finally he could not break loose because Krail, without any sense held a chair over his head, to beat him with. He did not choke Krail, much less beat him bloody, as Krail bled a bit only because he fell. That this happened can be verified by the Crown Inn keeper Waldenmayer, Jacob Hartman, the innkeeper's helper, the innkeeper's wife, and Johann Friderich Mayerlin, and also Joseph Schwegler.*

*As for the rest, Muehlecker was reprimanded, again, and now for the last time, for his habitual, quarrelsome and outright offensive lifestyle to God and Man, with the warning that if in the future he again got into disputes, and if his rotten nature did not improve markedly and correct itself to become a gracious gentleman, he would at once be taken up for grievous corporal punishment.*

*Decision*

*Because the barbieri Muehlecker, a known rowdy and quarrelsome person in this township, and because he was the evident author of this beating according to the disposition of the witnesses he should well deserve the full measure of punishment:*

*1 “large outrage” punishment of 14 fl. and because he violated the holy Christ Holiday Johannes, profaning it, along with this, into the poorbox here*

*1 Pfund Heller with 43 x to the poor box.*

*Barbieri Krail, because he also violently struck Muehlecker, gracious gentlemen, in the same way*

*1 “small outrage” punishment with 3 fl 15x owed to be paid.*

It was a juicy punishment that Muehlecker was dealt. By “outrage” [*Fevel*] one understood not only the deed, but also the punishment for the deed. The large outrage was for atonement, because blood was shed. Along with this (less expensive) small outrage there was (an even cheaper) women’s outrage [*Weiberfrevel*] and the liars outrage. At the bottom came the holiday extra [*Feiertagzuschlag*] to the poorbox. The associated reprimand with the threat of corporal punishment was unusual. Of course, it did not help much.

**Johannes Muehlecker**  
**A Negligent Debtor**

With such a large family, meager earnings, and frequent tavern visits, it is understandable that one comes into debt. This underlies the following announcement of the town from February 1765. But note also that the creditors’ had a hard time collecting. Despite the high penalties [*“Pressgeld”*] (we call that today *Mahngebuehren* -- collection fees) and six installments. And 75 Gulden was in those times already a small fortune, the value of five pails of wine.

*Chiruegus Muehlecker*  
*was called this session when these items were set down.*

*Chirurgus Muehlecker owes:*

*The Brgstr. Jordanen for stone settings on Georgi 1763*

*12 fl. 56 x*

*Pressgeld 4 fl.*

*for Brgstr. Plates*

*Sum 20 fl.*

*Mararetha Pforstin, recently married in Heppach*  
*8 fl.*

*H. Amtman Stoelzlen in Hedelfingen*  
30 fl.

*Total*                      75 fl. 56x

*Considering that already 4, in fact 6 installments for payment of the items were given, the collection fees of 4 fl. have already run out...*

No wonder that he presently sought to discharge his outstanding debts. And it is understandable that his arch enemy the Chirurgus Krail put in an appearance first at this session. Indeed he had an outstanding bill to the widow of the schoomaster Weeber for services to her dead husband. But Krail was compassionate, and he settled the debt during the session.

### **Johannes Muehlecker** **The Poisoning – almost a Crime Story**

Actually the case would be a harmless matter had Chirurgus Muehlecker held to the medical code of silence. The widow Nuding had a maid from Hebsach, Johanna Boes by name, who brought for her mistress a pastry [*Muetschelen*] from the Schorndorf market. As widow Nuding became ill after the treat, she called for Muehlecker who expressed the opinion that she had been poisoned, “ihr sei vergeben worden.” [vergeben = poisoned in 18<sup>th</sup> Century German] The maid complained of Muehlecker’s opinion before the church court. The court agreed to take down the facts of the case for presentation to the Schorndorf overseer. However, nothing further proceeded there, as one knew Muehlecker well. He was just again “doll und voll” [dim and drunk], but read for yourself.

*Actum 6 Oct. 1765*

*Praesentibus Subsignatis*

*Johanna Boesin, born in Hebsach, servant maid to Melchior Nuoding’s widow brings the complaint that she is blamed as if she wanted to poison her mistress. At the last Schorndorf Market Day, she said as complainant, she bought some shortcake from the baker Luitgardten, some of which she brought to her parents and her mistress, so that they also could enjoy it.*

*Shortly after it was the same for her...pressing pain, so that Muehlecker was called in, who immediately upon his arrival said she was poisoned, and he would give her something which would help her at once.*

*And because not only her mistress persisted on the point that she, the complainant wanted to poison her with the prized shortcake, but also that Muehlecker announced here and in Hebsach, that widow Nuoding had been poisoned by her maid, but to the contrary she [the maid] is an honest women who cannot abide such accusations, so please examine this matter to restore her good name.*

*The widow Nuding was interrogated thereon, testifying that she had received a shortcake from her maid Johanna Boesin. After the evening meal she consumed half. An hour later she felt nauseous and began to vomit, which is why she called for Muehlecker. He came*

*at once and brought her medicine, two full tablespoons taken with brandy. Before that however he asked her if she had eaten anything suspect...She answered him without malice that Boesin was an honest maid, she did not believe she wanted to poison her. The chirurg Muehlecker defended himself thus: He was called to the widow Nuding on the said Thursday, meeting her as she lay on her bed. She was very flushed and was vomiting violently.*

*As soon as she ate the shortcake she became ill. For which he gave her an anti-poison in brandy, which had such a good effect that she soon recovered. In Hebsach he made no announcements of this event. Even less was it true that he was "doll and voll," dim and drunk at the time, when he left the widow Nuoding. The very least to be brought against him was that he alleged to the widow that her maid was responsible for her pains.*

#### *Conclusion*

*Facts presented to the most honored Schorndorf district Superior Office, obediently to be judged. Pastor, officials, and church court judges.*

### **Johannes Muehlecker**

#### **Finale**

Toward the end of the 1760's, it quieted down around our Chirurgus. A short entry allows us to surmise that he still had some difficulties with the authorities.

*Actum d. 8.1.1768*

*Johannes Muehlecker, Chirurgus fined because of disobedient, baseless witness against Geradstetten rule: 1 fl.*

On 2 December 1778 according to an entry in the Geradstetten "Leuch-Buch" [body record] he died and was buried in Welzheim. As he was without means, the Welzheim officials asked the town of Gerastetten to underwrite the burial expenses. Upon consideration it was decided to split the costs between the town and church treasuries, according to a record of the agreement sent to the overseer. It is the last written record of the active life of Johannes Muehlecker, Chirurgus of Geradstetten.

*Actum d. 4 Dec. 1778*

*Johannes Muehlecker, Chirurgus died at Welzheim 2 Dec, and the Welzheim upper office wrote here that he left nothing behind for his burial, that payment should be sent; that then 2 fl. 30 x was taken from the town account and 2 fl. from the church account. Because the case should be settled with the Schorndorf Duchy office, we await further orders from them, if the money should be sent for restitution, and thus the matter is until then postponed.*

His widow Maria Catharina outlived him by more than three decades. At the death of her husband she moved to Schlierbach and supported herself on day wages from spinning.



She prepared a request for support in 1815 to the Geradstettn church court. It was turned down because

*this impoverished person has been so long separated from us, and during this time has not paid her town dues!*