

## Georg Michael Mayerlen 1742-1809

...the schoolmaster is every inch a man.

Already the 1793 evaluation of the school visiting committee allows us to infer that Georg M. Mayerlen was not only an outstanding pedagogue but also enjoyed a high reputation throughout the whole town. As one of his successors at the organ bench, I would like to go through his vitae and draw a sketch of his life.

Yet who of the old hands of Geradstetten still knows his name? I do not even try to ask those who are newly arrived here, as he is commemorated only by a small plaque at his old workplace, and even there he has to take second place to his student, the composer Friedrich Silcher. Mayerlen is named in every Silcher biography, but even in the most distinguished one by Hermann Joseph Dahmen, the author devotes only a few sentences to him. It is therefore high time to bring the life of this Geradstetten schoolmaster into the proper light it deserves.

### His Youth

Georg Michael Mayerlen's entire life played itself out in Geradstetten. He was born here, educated here, worked 43 years here at the local school, and died in his hometown after a short retirement. Apart from a brief visit to Stuttgart for his examination as an assistant teacher, he barely left the Remstal. Both his parents also came from Geradstetten, the father a landowning vineyardman and cooper. We will report about his six-year-old brother Mathias later. As the last of several children, Georg Michael was born here on 8 April 1742. In the town baptism record it is noted:

*Georg Michael*            *(Father) Joseph Mayerlen, Cooper*  
                                  *(Mother) ux. Anna Barbara born Schwegler*

The godparents were his uncle Johann Friedrich, schoolmaster in Schwieberdingen and the pastor's wife Maria Magdalena Stoetzlen.

Nothing much is known about his youth. Even in the proceedings of the Church Court, in which there are many notes about the youth who sometimes leave their traces, you seek his name in vain. He was confirmed in 1756 and had then to decide on a profession. As his older brothers had already chosen teaching, and his godfather was schoolmaster in Schwieberdingen, the decision for him must not have been hard. Presumably he completed his apprenticeship here with schoolmaster Eberhard Friedrich Weeber, and after that took his post as assistant teacher. The first written notice of this is in the complaint of a father against the schoolmaster Weeber.

Actim d. 16 July 1762

*During this afternoon's Church Court it came up that Andreas Palmer, farmer and vineyardman here, testified at length about the following unseemly behavior. To which Schoolmaster Weeber held it was necessary for him to order the student Schabl to write*

*up the talkative and sky-larking students, among which was the said Palmer's daughter, whom the assistant teacher Mayerlen had warned, leaving it as a verbal reprimand.*

His predecessor Eberhard Fr. Weeber appears to have been sick for a long time, as one can infer from statements in the Death Register. He died in February 1763 at the age of only 37. The mayor and town council had then to decide on his successor. It was surely a gamble to entrust this assignment to the 21-year old assistant teacher George Michael Meyerlen.

The town council struggled with the choice, but when Mayerlen however declared that he would marry his predecessor's widow, he got the vote. In the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> [now 21st] Century this seems strange to us, but such matters were then common. The community could barely afford to take on the care of another widow and her children.

Shortly after the vote he stood before the Ducal Church Tribunal in Stuttgart for examination. And a few weeks later the old Dean Hiemer arrived on the scene to see for himself the new schoolmaster. Understandably he could not render a judgment over him, nonetheless he was of the opinion that a good choice had been made. The proceedings of his visit report thereon:

*Ludi Magister*

*Georg Michael Mayerlen, born 1742. Nominated by the community 14 April 1763. Confirmed by the Ducal Church Tribunal 19 April, same year. In office for six weeks. Has no trade, and no other posts. Chosen under the condition that he marry schoolmaster Weeber's widow.*

*School children*

<i>Summer</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>169</i>
<i>Winter</i>		<i>86</i>		<i>87</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>173</i>

*He has an assistant teacher.*

*Holds school everyday for six hours. Has no complaints about beginning pay or the school, a well built house, which the church and community built at great cost.*

*Test. Has the necessary gifts for a schoolmaster, acknowledged for this schoolmaster, still so young, so it is the fervant hope that he shows diligence in his schoolmaster and sexton post, He pays attention to good rearing in school, and conducts himself respectfully.*

At this point let us insert a report about the brother of our schoolmaster, Matthias Mayerlen, born 23 Feb. 1736 in Geradstetten, later a teacher at the *Hohe Karlsschule* in Stuttgart. He struck out on an Army career, as a note in the church records informs us. As a guardsman in the Company of the Obristen of Zulan, he married Maria Dorothea Orthweis in 1760, a daughter of the innkeeper of the Ox in Kirchberg.

The *Hohe Karlsschule* (1770-1794) was a personal creation of Duke Carl Eugen. It was founded as a military academy on the Solitude and shifted to Stuttgart in 1775. Kaiser Joseph II elevated it in 1781 to a University. The students, among them Friedrich Schiller, were reared with military discipline. The *Karlsschule* strove toward a high goal; its aim, to train young students in the humanities and arts, at the same time to teach them modern methods, was fully achieved. The Duke, his pedagogic interests well known, was personally involved with the school, especially in his obligation to building a good faculty. His successor Friedrich Eugen closed the school in 1794.

In accordance with the schools's founding purpose, the first faculty members were officers and non-commission officers. These latter were in office as assistant teachers and served at the same time as overseers. We can imagine that the young former guardsman Matthias Mayerlen was among them. He taught from 1771-1785 as an assistant teacher in the French language. We do not know where he acquired knowledge of French. Though they were not French natives, most French teachers at this time had spent long times in France. Mayerlen was often named as assistant teacher to the Language Master, P. Guinard. As Friedrich Schiller was that this time studying French at the *Karlsschule*, it is in the realm of possibility that he was taught in the lower classes by Mayerlen. Despite vigorous research, however, no written proof of this could be found.

### **The Citizen Georg Michael Mayerlen**

Here we must report on the life of our schoolmaster Meyerlen in the community. Even though he was already a respected master of his craft in his professional life, we find both happiness and suffering in his personal life, all things taken into consideration, though he had to defend himself from bad insinuations. He was not spared worry and sorrow over his two sons, nor from marital problems.

Only one year after taking over the school he took the leap into marriage. Even though he had taken on the obligation to marry his predecessor's widow, she appears to have had other ideas. She had chosen the widower Johann Adam Krayl, a "surgeon," or lay doctor practicing here. Mayerlen was thus free to make his own choice, and in Jan. 1764 married Elisabetha Barbara Jordan, the daughter of a master stone mason and member of the town council.

*ANNO, MDCCLXIV*

*d. 24 Jan After the banns were read three times, the wedding ceremony was performed, married: Mr. Georg Michael Mayerlen, schoolmaster here to Elisabetha Barbara, legitimate, unmarried daughter of Mr. Matthaues Jordan, town council member, mason.*

As just noted above, Meyerlen had major worries with his children. One daughter, Sibylla Catherina, born 1766, died at the early age of three. In 1768 his son **Immanuel Friedrich** came into the world. At the age of 10 he was sent to Latin School in Nuertingen, and from there he was accepted into the Ducal *Karlsschule*. Surely his Uncle Mathias interceded for him, and as French was required, he would have been taught by him. He stayed with the academy until the age of 18. He then chose the career path of an

officer, and in the year 1792 he served with the military in the Netherlands. In the years that followed he found himself in service with the Kaiser, at a station not named. As of 1802 he dropped out of contact. His father never heard anything from him again.

The son **Carl Joseph**, born 1778, determined to follow his father's profession. After apprenticeship he served as his father's assistant. It must have been a bitter disappointment for his father to see that his son lacked the aptitude for a teaching career. After his father's death he worked for a few years under the successor Kolb; as however personal problems set in, he left this service. He died here in 1828.

Along with these worries there were problems at home. After ten years of marriage, a crisis developed at home. His wife had problems with alcohol, neglected her housework, and could not hold her tongue in check. Mother-in-law and assistant teacher were mixed in with this affair. All this was no secret in the schoolhouse, and the whole town was abuzz with it. George Mayerlen decided to step ahead of the stampede of gossipers, and take the matter to the Church court.

He laid all his problems open before a session, and as he had important witnesses in support for his innocence, Pastor Fischer succeeded in bringing the business back to an even keel.

In matters of community reputation, he was not lacking. Already in his early years he was elected to the town council, where he served as parliamentarian ["Gerichtsverwandler"], and a little later we see him as a judge at the Church Court. So he could chime in on all questions of civil and church community, and this he did very satisfactorily, as we take it from the proceedings. He had open, unclouded relations with all the leading personalities of the town, the Mayor Johann Fr. Lederer and Pastor Christoph Fischer (until 1781) and then Jakob Beringer (1781-1810).

This was repeatedly confirmed in the many visitation reports, above all those by Dean Jos. Fr. Schelling, the father of the famous philosopher.

For part of his public reputation, he no doubt had to thank his financial independence. The much held picture of the "poor schoolmaster" did not hold true in this case, and to the contrary, he was regarded by his contemporaries as a well-to-do person. So Dean Schelling had to put down somewhat acidly (or jealously?):

*"For a schoolmaster, he is rich."*

We must add to this that the schoolmaster position in Geradstetten since the old days was not badly paid. In 1779 the town council had once more to record the schoolmaster's income. As in other Wuerttemberg towns, these consisted of many small amounts of cash, in kind payments, and use-rights payments. As a comparison we can look at the Pastor's pay. In total Mayerlen received a capitalized annual salary of 365 fl., while the Pastor received 498 fl. Many schoolmasters of the state could only dream of this pay!

The record of his pay components remains preserved. Along the way it gives an overview of the many little posts and duties for which he was responsible. Certainly some of these he delegated to his assistant, such as for example ringing the early bells and heating the schoolroom, but all in all it was a considerable work assignment.

*Actum d 29 Jan 1779*

*Here we review and bring into reconciliation the pay components of a schoolmaster here, which has not been recorded since 26 August 1717. What a schoolmaster can enjoy, consists of the following:*

<i>Schulgeld quartaliter [per head] for each child</i>		<i>15 x</i>
<i>from Church Administration Schorndorf</i>	<i>5 fl.</i>	<i>43 x</i>
<i>from township</i>	<i>10 fl.</i>	
<i>from church treasury</i>	<i>10 fl.</i>	
<i>from summer SundaySchool</i>	<i>2 fl.</i>	
<i>from poor box</i>	<i>2 fl.</i>	
<i>from Sexton duty from every citizen either 13 x or in wine as determined each Fall by the town council, so that it is at least</i>	<i>35 fl.</i>	

*For the heating of the schoolroom, until now 3 measures of wood and 100 bushels of kindling, but as the room has been enlarged, another measure of pinewood is added, thus annually he received free and delivered to his house*

*3 measures of beech wood  
1 measure of pine wood  
along with 100 bushels of kindling*

*Occasionals to be had:*

<i>From Marriages: 1 piece of meat, 1 portion wine and bread comes with the meat and</i>		<i>30 x</i>
<i>From burials for singing for each</i>		<i>16 x</i>
<i>    for bell ringing</i>		<i>16 x</i>
<i>    for striking (the hour)</i>		<i>16 x</i>
<i>    for abdication, resignations</i>		<i>16 x</i>
<i>From baptisms for striking and other tasks 1 portion of wine and bread</i>		
<i>A person, to help in singing for a burial</i>		<i>6 x</i>
<i>As organist the schoolmasters got which also should remain the same.</i>	<i>10 fl</i>	

*But because the organ, on account of the weather, often fails somewhat, so that he should himself attempt to take on this work, and help fix the organ, so as the costs of the small repairs by the organ master be avoided, added to the 1771 compensation will be the additional amount*

5 fl

*In return the schoolmaster should be responsible for the organ apart from major repairs.*

*For land the schoolmaster enjoys, on account of his writing for the upper office, one and one half quarter on the Lisse. Further for school service 29 Ruthen and three quarters high fields [Bergwisen]. 17 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> Ruthen vegetable garden by the church yard next to Andreas Palmer's children. Thereto, as the enlarged schoolhouse was built on an earlier garden, we add 9 more Ruthen high fields next to the footpath to be added to the school fields.*

*For writing deeds of purchase*

4 x

*Settled by T., Pastor, Mayor and town council members. (16 signatures follow, including that of Georg Michael Mayerlen.)*

Here another aspect of Georg Michael Mayerlen should be discussed, namely his helpfulness. Where it concerned the needs of his hometown, you could always depend on Georg. This is shown by his involvement with the community during the time of the Second Coalition Wars against France, 1799-1801. These required a short-term contribution of 5 times the taxation rate. Mayerlen immediately declared himself ready to give a hand to the town with a loan. He put at the town's disposal a total of 1000 fl. in two installments, an amount 3 times as big as his annual salary!

### **Schulmeister Mayerlen**

The newly chosen schoolmaster appears to acquitted himself well. For already three years later the Church Court expressed itself:

*Actim den April 1767*

*Praesentibus Subsignatis*

*At today's winter visitation it was found that the schoolmaster as leader in learning did well everything that was expected of him. Therefore, he should be commended for his application, and all God's blessing wished for him.*

### **The New Schoolhouse of 1776**

Mayerlen saw his first task was to solve the question of classroom space. The old schoolhouse in the Schmalzgasse had considerable deficiencies in construction so that enlargement was never in question. Relief could only come from new construction. Such a project took time, yet in 1775 the town council decided to build a new schoolhouse directly next to the church. It is what we now call the old Community Hall,

Kirchgasse 16. This also would lighten the burden of his side jobs as sexton and organist. We take it that the town council's decision, reached unanimously, had its seeds in the conviction and adroitness of Mayerlen. The resolution states:

*Actim d. 20 July 1775*

*As the old schoolhouse has for some time become so dilapidated, that there is danger it could collapse and cause major accident, so the whole council was convened to carefully deliberate on the matter. It was then decided to take a look at the school room, and its conditions were found to as bad as described, all seeing for themselves the necessity of building a new school. Whereupon the plot next to the church, which belongs to the town, was taken under consideration. This plot was found to be roomy enough in length and width for a new schoolhouse. Then the question was called, if a new schoolhouse was to be build on the plot be the side of the church, and so it was voted upon unanimously, that the old schoolhouse should be sold and a new one should be built on the site considered.*

Construction began already the next year, and a special occasion gives us news of this. Because the house *Kirchstrasse 16* stands on the spot of a former town cemetery, bones found there during excavation had to be "taken care of" by the grave digger, an unusual task for which he received extra compensation.

*The grave digger Johann Georg Haesele carried 16 complete skeletons out of the excavation site for the new schoolhouse, and sought payment for this; whereupon 1 fl was granted him from church funds for his labor and time, as written above.*

The new schoolhouse contained not only a teacher apartment but also, as our schoolmaster was also a farmer and vineyardman, an attached stall.

*...As for the aforementioned architecture, concerning the establishment of a swine stall, cow trough and various utilities in the kitchen, these belong to the new schoolhouse architecture...*

Concerning the school rooms themselves, we learn only that the carpenter installed two lecterns, one for the schoolmaster and one for his assistant that they had to finish themselves. With the toilets ["Sanitaerinstallation"], they saved money at any rate, because after a few years the church court had to deal with some unpleasant matters:

*After the schoolmaster complained about the school children's excretions [Secreto], that the run off went in part to the cellar, also other 'inconveniences' were drawn there, so an inspection was undertaken by the master mason on a weekend day...*

All in all, the Geradstettener had a new schoolhouse and the Dean reported on it:

*Have a new well-built schoolhouse, which the town and church built, and maintain together as a team.*

At the start of Mayerlen's service the school class numbered about 170. Toward the end of the century Mayerlen and his two assistants had 260 students to care for! During the summer, instruction did take place in two classes, but to this reporter it is nonetheless a puzzle how Mayerlen could manage in a school room barely 85 square meters in size. The Dean himself could only write in astonishment:

*The inspecting visitor can attest that despite the swelling student population of over 200, the school was found in proper good condition, and no where did one notice any deterioration.*

### **Schoolmaster as Judged by the Authorities**

The school at the time was solely the business of the church. Even though chosen by the town council, the schoolmaster was subordinate to the pastor. It was his duty to visit the school at least once a week and check on its orderliness. With Pastor Jakob M. Beringer (1781-1810), who was, after 1797, assisted by his son Immanuel as vicar, Meyerlen spent the largest part of his service. He had harmonious and warm relations with both of these, as the records attest. This statement also goes for Schultheiss Johann Fr. Lederer\* (1772-1812). There is no doubt that these good human ties also advanced the fortunes of the school.

The Schorndorf Dean visited the towns of his diocese every 2-5 years, especially to look at school conditions. For the record of his visit to the town the pastor had to complete an outline. Substantial and strong, spontaneous statements of the Dean from Schorndorf are frequently in this record. A few of these evaluations are recorded here, while others can be found in great number.

*Testimonium (1792)*

*Is an able man who trained himself in concepts and culture through the reading of good books, and is esteemed in town for the way he stands before and directs his school, not only because of his considerable ability but also and especially because of his decency and good character.*

*His handwriting alone is not up to his other good qualities. The whole village spoke with esteem of him.*

*Test. (1804)*

*Is diligent in school and beloved by his students and on that account treasured by the parents. Conducts himself in an orderly way, shines with a musical talent. Has considerable wealth – heard in confidence-- We find there is no decline in the schoolmaster's spirit and hope therefore to keep him for a long time.*



These evaluations show the steadily growing appreciation that the schoolmaster enjoyed. We learn here that he trained himself through the reading of good literature, as his apprentice and assistant days were not quite sufficient by themselves to turn him into an excellent educator.

### **The Musician Meyerlen**

The relations between church and school were very close in matters of music. Since the Reformation it was the task of the schoolmaster to strike up a tune during the service and lead the church in singing. With that his students were quite helpful, as one part of his schoolmaster duties was to train his students in these hymns. Organs with which one could lead church singing were only to be found in the cities.

We hear for the first time of an organ in Geradstetten in the year 1702. Not only is “the church renovated, but also it is embellished with an organ.”

The schoolmaster was confronted with the problem of leading the singing during a time of a constantly growing population, and thus of church attendance. Only by obtaining a larger organ could help be had. We can take it that Meyerlen was the driving force when in the year 1767 the town took upon itself to order a new organ. The town found a solid craftsman in the master organ builder Spaeth from Faurndau, as the chosen tonal character of the organ made clear.

Meyerlen certainly was a practical organist, who took care of his instrument. Therefore, he accordingly had acquired the knowledge to tune the pipes and make small repairs. What music did Meyerlen play on the organ? The written basis here leaves us in the lurch. A hint is given by the character of the instrument.

Following in the south German tradition, it had one manual and only two registers in the pedals for strengthening the manual play during long tones. Meyerlen would hardly have played Bach and north German organ masters on such an instrument, rather probably music from the south German composers Praegung, Joh. Eberlin, Joh. Simon, Mich G.Fischer and Justin Knecht.

With this we come to the singing in the school. Meyerlen appears to have been a towering musical pedagogue. The written signs of this stem from his later years. Until the turn of the Century singing in the school hardly stood out, it simply belonged to normal instruction. The melodies of the old church songs had barely changed over the last Century, not many new ones were added.

The introduction of the hymnal of 1791 brought new difficulties. In text and melody, the hymnal seemed entirely out of place. It turned away from the previous traditions of Reformation and piety. No wonder that the predominantly rural towns of the Remstal bristled at its introduction. Not so in Geradstetten. Already in 1794 Meyerlen had the hymnal in use in school. Slowly his efforts bore fruit, for in 1802 the Schorndorf Dean reported:

*It deserves to be noted that here the religiously inclined need not first ask, whether the melodies can be sung, in that the new and old melodies are sung here with the same skill.*

And in the evaluation of the Mayor it says:

*Test. The diligence of this accomplished schoolman is acknowledged. He has a unique talent for music, especially at singing. The hymn “Womit soll ich dich wohl loben” [How shall I praise You highly] is sung in school quite melodiously and according to the new music, without any sour notes...*

The school visitation of 1802 concluded with the remarks of praise:...*and in singing the school children out do themselves.* Two years later, additional praise, not only for singing:

*The children read to the end, without errors. spell very precisely, and from memory – in division many are able – the singing is exceptionally melodious.*

This accomplishment was not only appreciated in Geradstetten, it was spoken of as well in the neighboring towns. So the Dean could confirm for the Schoolmaster Meyerlen at the end of his career:

*Testim. Is diligent in the school, beloved by the youth and on this account praised by the parents. Conducts himself in an orderly way. Shines with a musical talent, the church singing is outstanding and draws people from the neighboring areas to listen. In school, the hymn Aus deine Quelle, Schoepfer [Out of Your bounty, oh Creator] is sung with extraordinary beauty.*

It is therefore no surprise to us that in 1803 Schoolmaster Weegman in Schnait [neighboring village] sent his young, musically inclined stepson Friedrich Silcher to Geradstetten for his schooling. He could not have found a better teacher! [Silcher went on to become perhaps the most famous German folksong composer, 1789-1860.]

### **Farewell to School Service**

At the age of 64 he was forced, on health-grounds, to step down from his post. In his letter of resignation we learn how much the well being of the school lay on his heart. And in the end, the mutual respect forged over so many years between the town council and the schoolmaster became again abundantly clear.

*My highly respected Gentlemen:*

*It is now 43 1/2 years that I have been called to direct the school as teacher here, as well as perform the duties of sexton and organist. In the course of these years I feel a noticeable failing of my strength so far as hearing and eyesight are concerned; and as without these, the students in due time will no longer be as obedient, so above all you must require a man have the strength and energy to teach them...*

*I thank [the council] for all the love you have shown me during the time of my post, hope for the continuation of your true friendship, and be assured that I will persevere until I am in my grave.*

*Geradstettn 26 July 1806.*

*My high respected Gentlemen, I am your obedient servant,  
Georg Michael Meyerlen*

A few days earlier he was publicly recognized. The Royal Synod – today we would say the High Church Council – honored him for his church music. Dean Hauff delivered this commendation in writing on the occasion of the school visitation.

The “*kurze LebensRest*” [short retirement rest] spoken of in his resignation request was not to be granted. Only three years later he died, on 19 July 1809, at the age of 67.

### **Appreciation**

I have been busy for a long time with our Geradstetten Schoolmaster Georg M. Meyerlen and tried to tap all accessible sources. And always again I was astounded by the life work of a man who in 40 years as teacher “was beloved by the children, and on their account treasured by the parents” [*von dem Kinder geliebt, von des Eltern um deretwillen geschätzt*]. And as this man and community member was so highly respected in town, the town council unanimously gave the testimonial: “the entire council spoke with esteem of him” [*der ganze Durchgang (Rat) sprach mit Achtung von ihm*]. In our times, when so many standards have been lost, we can hold high our “*Schulmeister*” as an example.