

Pastor Gottlieb H. Wittich, M.A. 1836 -- 1844 and his Yearbook on Geradstetten

In the archives of the pastorate you can find a yearbook maintained by Pastor Wittich from 1836 -- 1844. These handwritten records give us a window into the political, social, and church conditions in Geradstetten. The yearbook shows that Pastor Wittich followed changes in these times with open eyes. His strongly conservative views did not however prevent him from critically considering all sides of the problems of his time, such as overpopulation, industrialization, the coming of the railroad, etc.

Pastor Gottlieb H. Wittich was the son of the pastor of Hundersingen. His father became well known in his time through his efforts to improve teaching conditions and vocational training. During his service in Geradstetten the son Gottlieb established the so-called "Industry school," in which young women were trained to earn their way through handicrafts of all kinds. For that he received honors from the Synod. His two sons were also very successful men. The older, Prelate Dr. von Wittich, was the *Landtagsabgeordneter* of the main office of Aalen. He bequeathed his father's yearbook to the pastoral library of Geradstetten because "*it belongs there.*"

The yearbook in quarto format of about 160 pages was maintained in manuscript during that time. The sequence is year by year with the following themes:

- People
- Future of the Community
- Weather
- Fruit Production
- Wine Production

In between he sprinkled local themes (poverty, education, agriculture, church life, town council). The purpose of his record is announced in his foreword:

The author sets out to write this town chronicle with the conviction that it will be of interest to look back and consider the causes of steps forward and backward in the intellectual, moral, churchly, religious, and economic relations, and through them to inquire into suitable means for progress and the remedy of the remaining problems.

Geradstetten in the first decade of the 18th Century

It was a time of general upheaval in economic and social regards. The mayor at the time, David Fr. Lederer*, had enormous work to do because of the decrees of King Wilhelm I, which did away with century old [feudal] burdens, and addressed the decline of agriculture. Handcrafts and business released themselves from the constraints of the guilds, and freed themselves from the old barriers. The community administration was newly reorganized, and schools moved slowly, step by step, out of church control. The traces of these upheavals showed up in Geradstetten also, particularly in matters of public order.

Pastor Wittich next made a survey of local conditions. He reported first, as befits a pastor, on the moral and religious state of the town:

According to the truthful examination of its pastor, the state of the community in moral and religious respects tends more to the good than the bad, and is from the point of view of diligence, frugality, and homeliness in general praiseworthy. The majority of people renounce without grumbling all the comforts and delights of exterior life, and are used to the fact that life's task consists of toil and privation.

Concerning those who do not yet have much Christian, religious feelings, make no mistake that there remain for them feelings for honesty, citizenship, and culture.

He then attempted to put the opposing aspects of civil and church arrangements on a new basis. Through the social upheavals, these relations had had been pushed out of plumb.

Soon after the beginning of his pastorate he assembled the tax board and the citizen committee to make known to these colleagues his wishes and expectations concerning culture and order, and thus ensure the welfare of the community. These came before all:

Please ask the upper school board to fill the second assistant teacher position. Install a police assistant for handling public order, and chase off out-of-town beggars, by whom the community is pressingly burdened. Keep police hours for the restoration of peace and quiet at night.

The Geradstetten Citizens in these Times

Pastor Wittich conscientiously kept statistics on population development in the town. His figures do not quite cover an entire decade, but they do allow trends to be recognized. Only since 1851 do we find official counts in the OAB of Schorndorf. In the indicated period [1836 -- 1844] the population rose almost 12 % from 1632 to 1844 people. *Remarkably only one case of emigration to America was recorded.* [Italics supplied by translator.] The rate of births hardly changed, likewise the death rate among grown-ups.

The death rate among children in comparison was alarmingly high. In 1841, 39 passed away compared to 23 grown-ups. Every two or three years, epidemics struck the Remstal, and in 1839 two-thirds of the children born that year died of scarlet fever. Two years later hooping cough and measles were the causes of death.

In 1843, many supplementary vaccinations had to take place because of the appearance of small pox in Winterbach. Formerly there was opposition to the mandatory vaccinations. As required by the authorities, the pastors could only admit vaccinated children in to the confirmation classes, a policy opposed by many of the clerics. However the parties seem to have united in this matter.

On the other hand, the Pastor unreservedly supported the struggle of the authorities to contain the drinking habit. In particular when it concerned immoderation at church

occasion such as weddings and wakes. In his "Remarks of the Moral State of the Town," he wrote a page "Philippika" against the drinking habit, and demanded at the same time that *police precautions be taken to contain unbridled immoderation*. He took particular heart to keeping the Sunday peace. Thus we will not ascribe any anti-Semitism to him when he wrote:

...but also the town leaders must make it their duty in the future no longer to allow the Israelites to drive their animals through the town on Sundays and Church holidays, especially during services, not to speak of doing business...

With "Genugtuung" he could ascertain that all inhabitants of the town were Lutheran, *apart from one Catholic!*

Agriculture and Wine Production

The author paid high attention to fruit and wine production. No wonder, as they were the main sources of earning for the Geradstetten people.

The field productions did not depend on the "*Dreifelderzwang*," almost exclusively grain, corn, and wheat were grown. Their yield did not cover the needs of the growing population. Most of the fields were worked by hand. There were in town at this time not even ten plows.

He reported in detail on weather conditions and their influence on the yield of individual crops, and on diseases. It is amazing how as a pastor he understood the relation between production and agricultural yield, and how he described by name the vicissitudes of the growing season. A description from the year 1831 shows us this:

Weather and Fruit Production 1843

This year similar to previous years had unfavorable weather. This was in line with the previous years 1829, 32, 33. Frequent and strong rain in the summer months with low temperatures produced luxuriant hay and straw yield, but it was of low nutritional value.

The poor classes were in great need because of the late harvest due to bad weather. A lack of potatoes, high fruit and meat prices (Grain 8-10 fl. Per Scheffel [scoop], beef 10-11 x per pound). Along with this, low earnings. On June 16, warm weather followed, so that the hay harvest was accomplished quickly and well.

Hills and fields stood in mourning because of the long wetness, but the problems and the prophesies of a 16 year cycle were not met. August's "Schlosenwetter" [hailstorm] caused immediate, lamentable damage in many sections of the land before the harvest. On 12 Oct there was a terrible storm from the east, followed by heavy rain and flooding in the Rems.

Concerning wine production, we must likewise credit Pastor Wittich with special knowledge. His communications and proposals, variety choices and workmanship suggestions, are today well-known and standard practice. In particular he supported the

practice of closed fermentation which had just become known in Geradstetten at the time. His report on the wine production of 1841 announces:

The grapes bloomed in the small vineyards in the cold wet weather of June, producing uneven grape production followed by partial loss of fruit. Heavy rains later in September allowed the quick onset of decay, so that it was necessary to begin the harvest already on Oct. 6. Too early for the red grape "Schwarzweissen" and similar varieties, but eight days too late for the earlier varieties, according to our vineyardmen here.

Because this delay caused dissatisfaction and discontent on many sides, it led to the question, whether it was not in the interest of this valley town to propose, in view of the conditions, an earlier harvest for its white, earlier ripening varieties?

The quality of the wine produced falls into the mediocre class for the early varieties, in the later varieties, while small in quantity, the quality exceeded last year's wine despite the fact that it did not quite lose its decayed taste. Weighed according to the Stuev'schen scales in the Fall of 90. Sold at the price of 40-44 fl. Per pail.

The yearbook of Pastor Wittich contained countless more reports of Geradstetten town life of the times, even ones that give us pause to reflect today. In the publication "500 Years of the Konrad Church," I told the story of the hidden treasure in the Schurwald. This time we close with a story which took place in the neighborhood of Buoch. This is a prime example of how gullible people can be. But this quality was never tied to a particular age!

Spirit Deliverance in the Buoch Forest 1838

Almost at the same time there was a poor woman from Buoch parish: "she was often frightened by a fearful groaning and sighing and complaining when gathering wood." A woodsman who often passes through this area himself also reported hearing similar wailings. The woman also claimed to have heard a voice, the spirit, begging her to help redeem the spirit from a 300 year-old wrong. This was to be accomplished by praying and performing other rituals revealed to the woman to make herself helpful to the spirit. In return, the woman's child, who at that time was sick, would be cured, and a great reward would be forthcoming. First the woman would have to fight a great battle against Satan because he would do everything in his power to oppose the spirit's redemption.

This story produced a wild sensation in the entire region. From every direction great streams of people gathered on that certain Sunday on the designated place in the woods. They sang hymns and waited for the redemption with fervent faith. After an enthusiastic prayer, the woman fell to the ground in convulsions. All eyes were glued to the spot where Satan was to appear, when from another direction the official actuary of Waiblingen along with several hunters came upon the gathering. The actuary ordered the woman to follow him. As the hunters started to wander through the assembled people, they all scattered in unseemly haste down the mountain, and the last act [of the drama] came to an end.

Had the actuary delayed his unexpected visit by one hour, then the disappointment of the people would have occurred by itself as they observed the empty fantasy and dreams of this fanatic from Buoch.

Pastor Wittich would have been a poor pedagogue had he not used this opportunity to put forward this admonishing example to the community. So on the following Sunday he preached on Mathew 22, 23-33! [‘God is not the God of the dead but of the living.’]