

Pastor Johannes Brand 1656-1661

Eight years after the Treaty of Westfalia was signed, ending the Thirty Years War, Johannes Brand took on the post of pastor in Geradstetten. The town and area still showed the scars of devastation that marauding armies of all countries had left behind. The authorities attempted by all means to bring back morals, customs, and justice. Discharged soldiers and those who had become homeless needed to be housed, and put to work. Here before all else, the church and its pastor were required.

He was not born a Wuerttemberger. His hometown was Strassburg, where he probably came into contact with the Duke's family, who had found refuge from the war there. After his studies in Tuebingen he worked for eight years at court as the tutor of the princes. At the age of thirty he came here with his first wife, a Tuebingen pastor's daughter. She died the next year in childbirth along with her daughter Rachel. With his own hand he wrote in the death records ["Leuchbuch"]:

Anna Katharina, M. Joh. Brand's legitimate wife, [taken] in childbirth in her 29th year, along with her child.

Her gravestone is preserved today, the only one from the first cemetery by the church. It can be found in a small enclosure on the south side of the chancel, evidently an old interment repository ["Beinhaus"]. The broken stone was restored by the church tower masons; its inscription is shown on the next page: [The next page in the original shows a photograph of the stone, with Latin inscription, along with a German translation, whose English translation is:]

In memory of the honored wife Anna Katharina, daughter of Mag. Ulrich Mader, previously the wife of the famous theologian Joh. Fr. Sellinger, then loyal wife of Mag. Joh. Brand, formerly Wuerttemberger teacher.

Born 27 Nov. 1628. Died 6 April 1657

Rachel and Mother had to share their same fate.

Pastor Brand's first assignment was the restoration of the old Church Book [family records, destroyed in the town hall fire of the Thirty Years' War]. He reported:

1661, on 29 July the pastor reported each citizen's age, as no old baptism book is at hand, and after performing this deed, blessed the record with wine and five masses.

In the same year a visitation [by outside authorities] took place. According the statement of those presiding, the community was very satisfied with its pastor:

Total of all Parishioners 380

[He] is a fine, sedate, well educated and theological man, a spirited preacher and an insightful conversationalist, with which, according to the special praise of the old mayor, everyone is satisfied.

Accusations of Witchcraft

According to other reports the pastor's relations with community representatives were not very trusting. Pastor Brand remarried, and took into his house his wife's younger, 18 year-old sister, Susanna Cath. Bader. On 14 Jan. 1659 an event came to pass that brought two Geradstetten women under suspicion of witchcraft.

To fetch some milk, the young Susanna went to the house of her neighbor, Maria Layhle, a midwife married to the mayor. She was offered a slice of bread and asked to warm herself by the oven. Upon returning home she experienced heart pounding and a feeling of weakness, then cramps with vomiting in the next days. The doctor called from Schorndorf could not explain the symptoms and designated the cause as a true spell and bewitchment [*ein recht Zauberstueck und Hexenwerck*].

As the health of the young patient did not improve, Pastor reported the event in writing to the Duke. The pastor took up the hint of the doctor, that witches had a hand in the event. In several sentences he next accused the mayor's wife Maria Layhle as well as the midwife Maria Rau, wife of the tailor, Christoph Rau. They were decried throughout the town because of their association with witchcraft. In the interest of evenhandedness, it must also be mentioned that long before the accusation these ladies had in a verbal exchange with the Pastor, scolding Susanna Bader as a little whore [*ein Huelein*]. Her reputation in town appears as well to be not the best.

We cite the writings of the Pastor:

...Still the same Monday evening she received medicine from the Schorndorf doctor: on Wednesday upon his consultation she was bled whereupon she improved somewhat, though after this she became weaker and she lay stiff and stricken like a wooden figure, no muscles moving, and when the epileptic fit was over one must assume that death would soon follow; as then the whole night the patient was overcome by major weaknesses.

On Thursday she improved so much that she had no special pains, but still felt weak. On Friday in the morning, after constant prayer, she had to lay down, and after the service I saw her again in the old condition, then in the late afternoon her arm and hands were twisted hideously, these were hard as wood, and her throat and head were racked with terrible pain.

Until evening's twilight she suddenly woke, straightened her hands and feet, and called out that she felt someone pressing her hand, but she had finally overcome them. Yes, she felt as if someone had walked away from her, though I saw no one.

...Especially however what makes the mayor's wife so suspect is her special relation with Maria, the tailor Christoph Rau's wife, someone known in town to be a person of magic and spells with whom no one wants to have anything to do, who many would like to expel, even though no open complaint has been made to the authorities.

Matters developed as they must. Next the wife of the mayor was taken to Schorndorf. She was able to refute the accusations of the pastor. In the further course of events the overseer accused the tailor's wife Maria Rau, who was actually not prepared for it, to make a deposition. She was locked in the tower and tortured on the rack. Because she also remained silent and made no confession, she had to be released under orders of the Duke.

The entire trial history was written up in the Schorndorf newspaper *Heimatblaettern* in 1988. The proceedings of this trial take up more than 100 pages in the State Archive, mostly comments of the law faculty of the University of Tuebingen.

Even though the author of this record knew that there were few witch trials in the Duchy of Wuettemberg, he had to admit he did not feel good about this trial. The behavior of Pastor Brand is hard to explain today. Evidently the Geradstetten and Schorndorf authorities felt the same. After only a five-year term of service, he moved on the Winterbach.

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