

**Around the
Konrad Church in Geradstetten**

Stories of Old Times
“Geradstetten People – It Takes all Kinds!”

Collected and Published
by

Hans Rilling

Translated by William F. Palmer

Rund um die Konradskirche Geradstetten

Geschichten aus alter Zeit
“Geradstetter Leut’ – Sotte und Sotte!”

gesammelt und herausgegeben
von

Hans Rilling

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Translator's Preface

Han Rilling, town historian of Geradstetten, has written and published a handful of books on many aspects of Geradstetten history and culture, among them the volume "Sotte and Sotte," which we translate here. Using church, town, and other archival records, mostly handwritten originals in the old German cursive, Herr Rilling has laboriously gone through these records, deciphered the fading script, and selected for us the most interesting ones, rendering them in the original, archaic spelling, but adding introductory, explanatory materials to help the reader. Along with these he has included photographs of samples of the originals and other related materials. We have only translated the text here, for which he has kindly given us permission.

With Rilling's other works, particularly "*Aus den Kirchenkonventsprotocollen 1707-1847*" and "*Wer haett au des denkt?*," these vignettes of various Geradstetten personages and events provide a window into the rich social history of the town, from the 16th Century to the 19th Century. With a history going back at least to the 11th Century, Geradstetten was in the times of this volume, primarily after the Thirty Years War, an independent, largely self-governing, small town of less than 1500 inhabitants. There was relatively little in or out migration, the economy of small farming and wine production changed little, and the church and town council were the caretakers of morality, civil order, schools, and other matters, down to making sure that the bakers provided a good supply of fresh bread. Schorndorf, a larger town some 5 km away, was the seat of the Duke's district administrative office, and from time to time his overseer's or clerical officials made inspection visits to Geradstetten, keeping the records that are the basis of some of Rilling's sources

From my research of the family tree of both of my parents during the era, back to the thirty Years War, many of the names in these volumes are familiar. When a relative crops up I have indicated so with the *-superscript after his name. From this research we also learn how hard life was in these times. Children and mothers routinely died in childbirth. Many children did not survive their first year. A woman might have ten children, with perhaps two or three surviving to maturity. Multiple marriages were common, as women and men were left widow or widower, with young children and the strong practical need to find a mate. As the town was a rather closed system, with many bloodlines well crossed, it is no accident that a few family names dominate, among these Palmer and Lederer, and most people in town were related in one way or another, adding to the strong sense of community that persisted at least to the times between the two World Wars, when my parents emigrated to the U. S.

The Second World War brought an end to much of this closed world and agrarian life, with the settling of refugees from the East on the north side of the Rems River, the continuation of industrialization, and the emergence of Geradstetten as a bedroom community for Stuttgart. Yet the spirit of that small town culture lives on in our memories, fed by stories told to us in our youth, and preserved here by Herr Rilling, for all to enjoy.

William F. Palmer

July 2001

Dear Reader in Geradstetten:

In working with town historical subjects, records of experiences of various kinds fell into my hands: everything that can happen in such a small town, the serious and the light-hearted, the shocking, the moving, and the banal. This history shows no perfect world, no shining heroes, rather many people with severely limited opportunities, who had to wrestle with the difficult circumstances of an often wretched existence.

The stories show us also that our community was organized down to the most obscure detail. The mayor's word was law, the pastor inexorably practiced Christian teaching, and even personal festivities like christenings and weddings were regulated. We gather from this: how thus the Geradstettener lived, in their poverty, with their wants and meager joys.

The stories are arranged chronologically. For better understanding I have occasionally added a short description of the current political and social circumstances. The text of the records are left for the most part in the original, to provide the reader with as authentic as possible a picture of the event. Numerous facsimiles [of the originals are provided to] illustrate how the accuracy of the text rendition depends on the legibility of such hand written records. These vary from the calligraphic masterworks of the ducal church administrators of 1550 to the scratchy handwriting of Mayor David Fr. Lederer* at the beginning of the 19th Century.

I have anticipated a sequel to this publication in which outstanding events of community life are put in the foreground, rather than here, where individuals are singled out. [These are collected in Hans Rilling's "We haett au des denkt?!"]

At this point I would like to thank the Hauptstaatarchiv of Stuttgart, the Town of Remshalden, and the pastorate archive of Geradstetten for reproduction rights of archive materials, as well as the Graphic Studio Baer Schoeller for energetic help in connection with printing.

Hans Rilling

On the History of Geradstetten

Geradstetten, an old vineyard village, was first mentioned historically in 1291. The town originally belonged to Wuerttemberg, but since the Middle Ages a third of the land was held by the family Zillhardt from the Goeppingen region as a knightly fief. They sold their part in 1687 to the House of Wuerttemberg. This peculiarity had as consequence that the town had two mayors and was subordinate to two overseers, the Schorndorf [ducal overseer of the House of Wuerttemberg] and the Zillhardt overseer. For administration, however there was only one town council, consisting of one or two citizens of each dominion.

Duke Ulrich brought the Reformation to Geradstetten (as to the entire Duchy) in 1534. For church matters the town was the responsibility of the "Spezial" (Dean) of Schorndorf. Since ancient days the three hamlets Bauersberg, Kernershof, and Rollhof belonged to the town. They went by these names since 1700, but earlier they were known by the names of their current owners. The history of the church is written down in [Rilling's] book "500 Years of the *Konradkirche*."

The main milestone in the history of Geradstetten, along with the Second World War, was no doubt the times of the Thirty Years War. The middle Remstal was then the crossroads and provisioning area of the warring factions, deserting soldiers, and homeless persons. In the town many houses and the town hall were burned down, along with the archived records and books. The population dropped by two thirds, and the [neighboring] hamlet of Foehrenbach was laid to waste. War and pestilence did their work. In several records these established facts are brought before our eyes.

The main earnings source was always wine production. At the beginning of the 19th century, among almost 1400 inhabitants, you can count over 200 vineyardsmen. Add to these another five dozen laborers who worked on the side in the vineyards. In good years wine production provided a certain level of prosperity for the towns people. Industrialization became noticeable only at the end of the 19th century.

The population in the 16th Century was about 500 persons. In the aftermath of the Thirty Years War this shrank to 220 persons. It rose in several steps in the succeeding years to about 1500 in the middle of the 19th century.

On Jan. 10, 1974 Geradstetten lost its political independence, and has since been a party of the newly founded community of Remshalden.