

**Around the
Konrad Church in Geradstetten**

Events from Geradstetten History
“Who Would’a Thought?!”

Collected and Published
by

Hans Rilling

Translated by William F. Palmer

Rund um die Konradskirche Geradstetten

Ereignisse aus Geradstettens Geschichte
“Wer hätt au des denkt?!”

gesammelt und herausgegeben
von

Hans Rilling

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Translator's Preface

Hans Rilling, town historian of Geradstetten, has written and published several books on Geradstetten history and culture, among them the volume "*Wer häett au des denkt?*," which we translate here. Using church, town, and other archival records, handwritten originals in the old German cursive, Herr Rilling has laboriously combed through the records, deciphered the fading script, and selected for us the most interesting ones, rendering them in the original dialect and archaic spelling, but adding explanatory materials to help the reader. Along with these he has included facsimiles of the originals and other related materials. We have only translated the text here, for which he has kindly given us permission. Translator notes in the text are in [square brackets].

With Rilling's other works, particularly "*Aus den Kirchenkonventsprotokollen 1707-1847*" and "*Geradstetter Leut' - Sotte und Sotte*," these vignettes of various 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 a part of the Duchy, later Kingdom (1806) of Württemberg. A population of about 500 persons in 1500 dropped precipitously in the Thirty Years' War, then recovered and grew to a high of 1700 persons in 1840, slowing declining again to 1300 persons in 1900. The economy of small farming and wine production changed little in these times, and the church and town council were the caretakers of morality, civil order, schools, and other matters. Schorndorf, a larger town some 6 km away, was the seat of the Duke's district administrative office, and from time to time his Overseer [Vogt] or clerical officials [Dean] made inspection visits to Geradstetten, keeping 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 an ancestor crops up I have indicated so with the *-superscript after his name. From this genealogical 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 somewhat closed system, many bloodlines are 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 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.

Dear Reader in Geradstetten

In the first volume of my stories “Around the Konrad Church in Geradstetten” I presented for the most part personal stories of townspeople. In this publication I would like to present events from Geradstetten history, small self-contained representations of town experiences. As earlier, we are dealing with large and small events, the significant and the insignificant, the shocking and the banal. Again the events reveal an imperfect world, not the usually cited “good old days,” rather the struggle, often fruitless, of many simple people, coping with the adversities of life.

The time span is somewhat widened here, beginning already with two Middle Ages documents from the early days of the town. The accounts are ordered chronologically, and a short review in the next section should make clear to us the political and social conditions of the times. Again in this publication the accounts are for the most part presented in the original text, so that the reader may gain as authentic as possible a picture of the event. Numerous facsimiles [of the originals] are shown, to indicate how so much of our work depends on the legibility of these documents.

The research into old Geradstetten family names taken over by me falls a bit outside of this framework. I was inspired to do this through my work with the Geradstetten “*Ältesten Kirchenbuch*” [oldest church record book] that Pastor Brand set up in 1649 after the Thirty Years’ War. As other lists have been handed down from the preceding 16th Century with names of Geradstetten townspeople [house lists, Turkish tax rolls, storage records], I attempted by various means to establish when certain common names first appeared. The poor legibility of some of the archival materials do not however always allow a definitive statement to be made.

The last section comprises a less than edifying story from the middle of the 18th Century. The title is “Mayday,” and the story concerns the theme of *Alcohol and the Schools*, one still current today. We gain, however, a glimpse here of how the town and the authorities dealt with each other!

Exactly as stated in the first volume, I have anticipated that this publication is to be followed by others. The Geradstetten “*Dorfrechte*” [village rights] are of especially great interest, providing an in-depth view into village life of the 16th Century. After that a publication stories of Bauersberger Hof are to appear.

At this point I would like to thank the *Hauptstaatarhive* of Stuttgart, the *Landeskirchenlichen Archiv* 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 the Village of Geradstetten

The origin of the village of Geradstetten lies in darkness. Only by the form of the town's name can we determine the approximate time or origin. Settlements ending with "stetten," before which stands a person's name (here Gerhard), were for the most part founded in the 9-11th Centuries. They lay mostly in favorable settings on the border of older towns, in our case those of the original Beutelsbach and Winterbach. Originally in the Württemberg domain, one-third of Geradstetten was since the end of the Middle Ages a feudal fief of the Zillhardt family from the Göppingen region. They sold their part back to Württemberg in 1687. This transaction was disputed for almost 100 years in an action brought before the high court in Vienna.

The town almost certainly was at the time of its founding an outlying satellite of Winterbach, as surmised by J. Seibold. In the matter of church affairs this dependency lasted until 1496. That year the Geradstetten mayor and his town council applied in a letter to the Bishop of Constance for the establishment of its own pastorate. The letter also shows that the political separation from the main town of Winterbach was by then long completed. The Württemberger Duke as patron and church leader supported the request, so that a few weeks later, the Bishop approved it. Duke Ulrich brought the Reformation to Geradstetten, as to the entire Duchy, in 1534. The village reported to the Overseer [*"Vogt"*, the Duke's representative in Schorndorf] in civil matters, and the Dean there [*"Spezial,"* prelate] was responsible for church matters.

Since ancient days the three [outlying] hamlets of Bauersberg, Kernershof, and Rollhof belonged to the town. They went by these names since 1700, but earlier they were known by the names of the then current owners. The history of the church community 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 village many houses and the town hall were burned down, along with the archived records and books. The population dropped by two thirds, the outlying farmsteads were destroyed and the [neighboring] hamlet of Föhrenbach was laid to waste, remembered now only by the name of that section of land. It took decades before orderly conditions were again restored in the town.

The main source of earnings was always wine production. Numerous abandoned vineyards in the town tells us that the land in wine production in early times was much more extensive in area than today. At the beginning of the 19th Century, among almost 1400 inhabitants, you can count over 200 vineyardmen. In good years wine production provided for a certain level of prosperity for the townspeople. Industrialization only became noticeable 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, and then sank to about 1400 before the First World War.

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