

Mediaeval Lynch Laws in Bavaria

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It is curious to note that in some parts of Bavaria a method of procedures which is called *Haberfeld treiben* still prevails, and is practiced by the people in case of offenses which do not come within the pale of the ordinary law. Neither person nor property is injured. People assemble with black or masked faces in front of the offender's house, and howl, fire rifles, and beat pots and kettles. A mock sermon setting forth the offense of the person concerned is then recited in the hearing of the misdemeanant.

A Haberfeldtreiben Stein

by Andre Ammelounx and Roy De Selms
SCI Master Steinologists

In southern Bavaria from about 1700 to 1900 the peasants had a form of justice similar to our Colonies where offenders might be put in stocks and ostracized as a form of punishment outside the official law. The Bavarian system was known as *Haberfeldtreiben* (literally: oat field happening). For this event a vigilante group would assemble and, fortified with beer and often in disguise, would march to an offender's house or maybe to a field or hill within hearing distance of the offender and read a proclamation of whatever offense had been committed. Then there would be an outburst of bell clanging, beating of drums, shouting and even gunfire, but no bloodshed. The point, of course, was to embarrass or shame the offender in a public way.

The first *Haberfeldtreiben* of note took place at Vagen in 1717 and major *Treiben* took place at Alabaching (1864), Edling (1865) and Hohenlinden (1866). Through two centuries 130 official *Treiben* took place, and there were undoubtedly many more unofficial occurrences. A shrine was even set up to commemorate a *Haberfeldtreiben* that took place in the *Zeller Wald bei Dietramszell* in 1886 (figure 1).



The last successful *Treiben* of note took place at night at Miesbach from the 7th to the 8th of October, 1893. Finally, in 1894 at two more *Treiben* the participants were arrested. A picture of one of the last such events was the subject of a drawing by Oskar Graf, 1895 (figure 2).



Despite official attempts to put a stop to these acts, old traditions die hard. It's worthy of note that there were sporadic *Haberfeldtreiben* in Germany in the 20th century and at least two in 2009 in Munich, but these have taken on the appearance of public demonstrations or protests and have drawn crowds of up to 2,500 from all over Germany. In Nov. 2008 over 2,000 dairy farmers assembled in *Ruhstorf an der Rott* to protest against the policies of the German Farmer's Assoc., headed by Gerd Sonnleitner, because of the fall in milk prices. This was repeated on June 3rd, 2009. Now each year on the last Saturday in August a *Haberfeldtreiben* is staged in Miesbach. There was even a hit(?) song called the *Haberfeldtreiber* performed at the 2009 Oktoberfest by Hanse Stoierer; a video of this performance is available on U-tube.

Figure 3 shows a stein made for a *Halberfeldtreiben* in Pasing near Munich in the late 19th century. We can judge the age of the stein by comparing the body style to those of similar dated regimentals which were made between 1893 and 1902. There is also a legend on the lower rear rim reading *Jos. Nussbaum. Zinngiesser. Entenbachstasse 48. Muenchen.* the name and address of a contemporary Munich pewterer. The verse surrounding the upper rim of the stein reads:

Heute Nachmittag dieses Jahres findet ein großes Haberfeldtreiben statt, beim Münchner Hofwirth in Pasing wozu ich meinen Freund Ant. Traub einlade. Jos. Huber.

This afternoon of this year a large mock lynching will take place at the Munich Court Inn in Pasing to which I invite my friend, Ant. Traub. Jos. Huber.

The stein was named to Anton Traub and presented to him as an invitation by the *Haberfeldmeister*, Josef Huber. The group gathered around Huber, the central figure identified by two white rooster feathers in his hat, as he reads the verse on a long scroll within earshot of the offender. This verse is difficult to transcribe from the Sutterlin style of writing and further difficult to translate from the Bavarian dialect, but a partial translation is as follows:

Im Nammen Kaiser Ka(rl d. Gr.) v. Unterberg mußen wir [?] minder Haberfeldtreiben. Wirken die Leut schon Opfers ... [?]

In the name of Kaiser Karl the Great of Unterberg we must (hold a) small Haberfeldtreiben. The people already cause sacrifice ... [?]

In Germany, and particularly in Bavaria, no significant event or tradition goes without notice on a stein. Perhaps one of our readers will be inspired by this example to build a collection of *Haberfeldtreiben* steins. One small shelf will probably be sufficient.

Photo credit: Figure 3, Andre Ammelounx

