

The *Charlottenschränk*. Born Out of a Nursing Shortage

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Abstract

Helping hands have always been in short supply, so in order to provide the late nineteenth-century rural population of southwest Germany with a minimum of medical utensils, a pastor came up with the idea of providing communities with a cabinet that became known as the *Charlottenschränk*.

Keywords: Community nursing, 19th century, Material Culture, Nursing Shortage, Hygiene

The *Charlottenschränk* in southwest Germany

The *Charlottenschränk* was a half-height (170 cm high, 90 cm wide and 45 cm deep) cabinet made of softwood. It was similar to a sideboard and had a door and a small drawer below the shelf. Next to the drawer was a small sign with the words '*Charlottenpflege*' (Charlotte nursing unit). This cabinet was found in southwest German villages.



Fig. 1: *Charlottenschränk*, Diakoneo, Diakarchiv Schwäbisch Hall

In the nineteenth century, the sick and those in need of care lived in sometimes catastrophic conditions. This was especially true of rural communities, including those in the southwest German Kingdom of Württemberg. Relatives rarely had any time for care, as every person was needed for agriculture. Single people in need of care were dependent on the charity of the community or their neighbours. It was therefore not uncommon for those in need of care or

bedridden to be left to oneself, without being washed or bandaged, or provided with a bed or food. The hygienic conditions were also extremely poor.¹

Nurses could usually only be found in cities, and had, as a rule received no training in nursing. From the mid-nineteenth century, it was mainly church institutions and charitable associations that wanted to provide support.² But there was a shortage of nurses during that time, and some communities could not afford to employ a community nurse. In order to provide some help, Pastor Karl Joseph Johannes Gastpar (1865–1933)³ invented the *Charlottenpflege* in around 1898. In 1900, he was awarded the Silver Karl Olga Medal by King Wilhelm II of Württemberg for ‘services in the field of community nursing’.⁴

Gastpar called his ‘cabinet for the improvement of nursing in rural areas’ the ‘*Charlottenpflege*’ (Charlotte nursing) in honour of Queen Charlotte of Württemberg (1864–1946, Queen from 1891), who had assumed patronage for Gastpar’s initiative.⁵ Popularly known as the *Charlottenschrank* (Charlotte cabinet), it was half-height and was equipped with various utensils for nursing the sick, e.g. crutches, thermometers, bandages, sippy cups and spittoons. The equipment sometimes also included close stools and hip baths, but no medicines were to

¹ Lecture by Pastor Hermann Faulhaber on 13 June 1881 at the parish meeting in Crailsheim, Diakarchiv Schwäbisch Hall, 13/2, cf. also Merz 1850; Hopf 1881; Schumm 1964; Sick/Sick 1922; Maisch/Krause 2011; Reports by the parish nurse Deaconess Lisbeth Weidner on the parish work 1887, Diakarchiv Schwäbisch Hall, 25/1; Krause 2005, p. 14.

² Krause 2005; Maisch/Krause 2011.

³ Personal file of Karl Joseph Johannes Gastpar; Christian Sigel: *Das Evangelische Württemberg – Seine Kirchenstellen und Geistlichen von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart*. 1910 (with handwritten additions until 1959), No. 1209/21, State Church Archive Stuttgart, A 127, No. 744.

⁴ Personal file of Karl Joseph Johannes Gastpar; Christian Sigel: *Das Evangelische Württemberg – Seine Kirchenstellen und Geistlichen von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart*. 1910 (with handwritten additions until 1959), No. 1209/21, State Church Archive Stuttgart, A 127, No. 744.

⁵ Prospekt der Charlottenpflege (=Prospectus of the Charlottenpflege) 2nd edition 1901, Gemeindecarchiv Mainhardt, Bestand Mainhardt A 699; Einführung von Krankenpflegekästen in Landgemeinden/1898–1910, Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg, E 162 I Bü 1478. Including 1 Aufruf an alle Freunde unseres Landvolks von Pfarrer Karl Gastpar in Unterriexingen (=Call to all friends of our Landvolk by Pastor Karl Gastpar in Unterriexingen), Schriftführer des Komitees zur Einführung von Krankenpflegekästen in Landgemeinden (=Secretary of the committee for the introduction of nursing boxes in rural communities), no date (around 1898). Einführung von Krankenpflegekästen (Charlottenpflegen) in Landgemeinden, Allgemeines 1898–1926 (= Introduction of nursing boxes, (Charlottenpflegen) in rural communities, general 1898–1926), Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg, E 191 Bü 3272. Including: Rundschreiben des Komitees zur Einführung von Krankenpflegekästen (Charlottenpflegen) in Landgemeinden betr. Einführung, Verwaltung und Pflege der Charlottenpflegen (=Newsletter of the Committee for the Introduction of Nursing Boxes (Charlottenpflegen) in Rural Communities concerning the Introduction, Administration and Maintenance of the Charlottenpflegen), 1902; Einführung von Krankenpflegekästen (Charlottenpflege) in den Gemeinden des Oberamtsbezirks Vaihingen (1898–1910) (= Introduction of nursing boxes, (Charlottenpflegen) in the municipalities of the Oberamtsbezirk Vaihingen (1898–1910)), Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg, F 209 I Bü 621; Rundschreiben betreffend die Einführung der Krankenpflegekästen „Charlottenpflege“ in Landgemeinden 1902 (= Newsletter concerning the introduction of the „Charlottenpflege“ nursing boxes in rural communities in 1902), Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, J 150/156, No. 35 and J 150/358a, No. 60.

be found in the cabinets.⁶ Funding for the furnishing and equipping of the cabinets was provided by the *Amtsversammlung* (Official Assembly) of the Kingdom Württemberg or the central management of charitable associations.⁷ In most cases, however, both the church and civil communities conducted local collections to raise the necessary funds.⁸

The cabinets were usually placed in parsonages or sometimes in the house of the *Ortsvorsteher* (head of the local community) or the teacher.⁹ If there was a doctor in the rural community (which was the exception in the nineteenth century and even up to the 1950s) the cabinet was best kept on his premises, as he also assumed medical administration of the cabinet.¹⁰ Otherwise, “a trained nurse, deaconess or a Sister of Mercy, or a former male nurse (military hospital assistant) [should] after some instruction on the part of the doctor, be quite capable of the proper administration and application of the means at the bedside”.¹¹ The utensils themselves were obtained from the *Zentralmagazin für Gesundheits- und Krankenpflege ‘zum roten Kreuz’ von Dr. Lindenmeyer in Stuttgart Königlicher Hoflieferant* (Central Magazine for Health and Nursing Care ‘zum roten Kreuz’ belonging to Dr. Lindenmeyer, Supplier to the Royal Court, in Stuttgart), while bandaging materials were also purchased through local pharmacies.¹² If care products were used on contagious persons, for example, those with diphtheria, measles, scarlet fever or tuberculosis, these products had to be packed in the formalin disinfection box that was available in every *Charlottenschrank* and sent to the *Königliche Hofwaschgebäude* (Royal Court Cleaning Facilities) in Stuttgart or disinfected by doctors in the communities themselves.¹³

Although the communities had to pay a monthly rent for the cabinet and its contents, the use of the items was free of charge to people in need of care.¹⁴ Money donations could, however, be placed in a small drawer in the cabinet.

⁶ Prospekt der Charlottenpflege (=Prospectus of the Charlottenpflege), 3rd edition, July 1902, Evangelisches Kirchenarchiv Bubenorbis.

⁷ Prospekt der Charlottenpflege (=Prospectus of the Charlottenpflege), 1st edition January 1900, Evangelisches Kirchenarchiv Bubenorbis.

⁸ Donation list from May 1900, Evangelisches Kirchenarchiv Bubenorbis.

⁹ Prospekt zur Charlottenpflege (=Prospectus of the Charlottenpflege), 1st edition January 1900, Evangelisches Kirchenarchiv Bubenorbis.

¹⁰ Letters of 18 May, 8 June, 24 July and 19 August 1905, Gemeindearchiv Mainhardt, Bestand Mainhardt A 699.

¹¹ Translation from the German original by the author. Prospekt zur Charlottenpflege (=Prospectus of the Charlottenpflege), 1st edition January 1900, Evangelisches Kirchenarchiv Bubenorbis.

¹² Prospekt zur Charlottenpflege (=Prospectus of the Charlottenpflege), 1st edition January 1900, as well as invoices, Evangelisches Kirchenarchiv Bubenorbis.

¹³ Prospekt zur Charlottenpflege (=Prospectus of the Charlottenpflege), 1st edition January 1900, Evangelisches Kirchenarchiv Bubenorbis.

¹⁴ Prospekt zur Charlottenpflege (=Prospectus of the Charlottenpflege), 1st edition January 1900, Evangelisches Kirchenarchiv Bubenorbis.



Fig. 2: Donation box in the *Charlottenpflege*, Diakoneo, Diakarchiv Schwäbisch Hall

It is possible to find out about how the *Charlottenschrank* was used by looking at the logbook that each administrator of the cabinet had to keep. The logbook begins with a list of contents followed by a description of how each item was used: i.e. the name of the borrower, his or her illness or the medical reason, the item borrowed, the day it was borrowed and the day it was returned, as well as whether the patient had recovered or died (marked with a cross). The logbook therefore provides important and interesting insights into the cases of illness and their outcomes within a rural community over a period of time.¹⁵

Tag	Abg.	Name des Patienten	Krankheit	Abg.	Abgegeben	Abgegeben	Abgegeben	Tag	Abg.
1898									
Novem.	25.	Louis Wagner, Altes	Unwohlsein		1	1	1	28	Nov. 1898
Dez.	3.	Liedl, Ehefrau des	Wegwehen	ganzen	2	2	2	48	Dez. 1898
"	7.	Leber, in. Leber	Opel...	1	3	3	3	27	"
Januar	3.	Gottlieb, in. Leber	Opel...	1	4	4	4	8	Januar 1899
April		Witten, Karl	Opel...		5	5	5	19	April " "
Mai	17.	Hoff, Leber	Opel...	1	6	6	6	25	" " "
"	18.	"	"	"	"	"	"	25	" " "
"	22.	Leber, Leber	"	"	7	7	7	25	" " "
"	25.	Hoff, Leber	"	"	"	"	"	25	" " "
Juli	1.	Leber, Leber	Opel...	ganzen				28	Juli " "
Aug.	21.	Leber, Leber	"	"				10	Aug. " "
"	23.	H. Karl, in. Leber	Opel...					3	" " "
"	24.	Hoff, Leber, in. Leber	Opel...					19	Ukt. " "
"	25.	Hoff, Leber, in. Leber	Opel...					24	Nov. " "
Sept.	14.	"	"					24	Sept. " "
Ukt.	3.	"	"					19	Ukt. " "
"	14.	Hoff, Leber	Opel...	1				19	" " "
Novem.	8.	Hoff, Leber	Opel...	1				2	Nov. 1900
"	25.	Hoff, Leber	Opel...	ganzen				8	" " "
"	"	Hoff, Leber	Opel...	1				28	Dez. " "
Dez.	11.	Hoff, Leber	Opel...	1				19	Dez. " "
"	12.	Hoff, Leber	Opel...	1				19	" " "
"	13.	Hoff, Leber	Opel...	1				19	Dez. " "

Fig. 3: Logbook for the *Charlottenpflege* Neuenstein, which was kept from 1898 to 1965, Diakoneo, Diakarchiv Schwäbisch Hall

¹⁵ Logbook for the *Charlottenpflege* Neuenstein, 1898 to 1965, Diakarchiv Schwäbisch Hall 267/17; Logbook for the *Charlottenpflege* 1900 to 1949, Evangelisches Kirchenarchiv Bubenorbis.

The *Charlottenschränk* could be found widely throughout Württemberg.¹⁶ Parishes in which a parish nurse was already employed also usually acquired a *Charlottenschränk*. For example, a deaconess from the *Diakonissenanstalt Schwäbisch Hall* (Schwäbisch Hall Deaconesses' Home) worked as a parish nurse in Neuenstein from February 1890.¹⁷ She then looked after the newly established *Charlottenschränk* from November 1898 and handed out the medical equipment to the patients.¹⁸ Although this *Charlottenschränk* remained there until 1965, most were abandoned in the late 1940s and 1950s. Improved medical care provided by doctors and the increasing mobility of the population in rural areas rendered the *Charlottenschränk* in its original form obsolete.

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¹⁶ Zentraleitung des Wohltätigkeitsvereins bzw. für Wohltätigkeit, Beihilfen für Krankenpflegestationen, Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg, Finding Aid E 191.

¹⁷ 28. Jahresbericht der Diakonissen-Anstalt [...] in Schwäbisch Hall 1913 auf 1914. Schwäbisch Hall 1914, p. 15, Diakarchiv Schwäbisch Hall.

¹⁸ Logbook for the Charlottenpflege Neuenstein, 1898 to 1965, Diakarchiv Schwäbisch Hall, 267/17.

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