

## **The Wehrlehof murder-suicide**



In the early 1980s, I began attending Wehrle meetings regularly, where I heard hints and vague statements about the tragic history and the end of the Wehrlehof. The farm had been one of the largest farms of Linach and all proceeds the children had received from the farm sale had been destroyed by inflation. No one could tell me more or give me any details: "It was never spoken about!"

In the chronicle of Linach I found the history of the Wehrlehof, where Wehrles lives to this day, without being able to determine the relationship to our family. [FAULER 1990: 161ff]. And there also came upon the folklore of the "Landenberger", which told of the gruesome past of the Wehrlehof, of Wehrlebur's drunkenness and extravagance and his terrible act of murder and suicide. The story was enriched with a silver knight who had appeared to Wehrlebur on his way home and the fear that Wehrlebur, too, would have to walk around spiritually like the Landenberger with his head under his arm until the abandoned Wehrlehof was once again home to a true farmer who would atone for the sins of his ancestors through diligent work in the fields and forests, the fear of God and piety [FAULER 1990: 102ff].

I took this story for what it was labeled: one of the countless legends that are told throughout the Black Forest, especially as I had not been able to produce evidence of this crime despite intensive research.

It would be decades later, when access to various sources became easier through the internet, that I found the decisive reference in the Linach family register<sup>1</sup>: "Shot himself after murdering his wife. Was not buried in church." [FB Linach: p. 218] The story of his dismissal proceedings was also documented in the family register of Vöhrenbach, where Augustin Wehrle's wife was born and raised. The priest there made a note in the family register [FB Vöhrenbach: pp. 103-104]:

*"[...] married to Augustin Wehrle, farmer in Linach (brother of the Fuchsloch farmer). Augustin, a „n'ver do well"<sup>2</sup>, was to be incapacitated*

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<sup>1</sup> Family registers are directories organized by family, which the parish priests compiled from the original church registers in the late 1930s.

<sup>2</sup> In the German original church record „Grand-Lump": „Grand" is from French language and means „big". „Lump" is literally translated „rag", but in German this word is also used as a derogatory swear word with the meaning of „scoundrel" or „rascal". Erika Wehrle provided the translation as „n'er do well".

*in order to save the rest of his property for his 8 children aged 1-13, so he ~~shot~~ stabbed his wife to death on 13. I. 09 and then [he] shot himself."*

Further research revealed a newspaper article reprint, which describes the crime in detail [Heimatgilde "Frohsinn" e.V. 2009 - No. 10: p. 33-34]:

# Villinger Volksblatt.

Illustr. Sonntagsblatt.
**Haupt-Tagesszeitung**
Landwirtschaftl. Beilage.

und freies Verkündigungsblatt für den badischen Schwarzwald.

**Abonnementspreis:** Vierteljährlich bei Voranleistung 3 Mk. 50 Pf., halbjährlich 6 Mk. 50 Pf., jährlich 12 Mk. 50 Pf. Durch den Zeitungsverkäufer für 12. auf 10 Mk. 50 Pf. nach sechs Monaten 10 Mk. 50 Pf.

**Einzelnen jeden Dienstag mit monatlich 2 Beilagen, wöchentlich 2 Beilagen und 1 Wochenbeilage.**

**Intentionspreis:** Die Einzelexemplare werden auch ab dem 1. März für 10 Pf. im Sommer während der Ferien 15 Pf. bezogen. Bei Abbestellungen mit anderen Zeitungen entsprechende Nachsch.

**Gelesenke Tageszeitung**  
Des Kreises Villingen.

1909

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*Linach, Jan. 14 (murder and suicide.)*

*It is further reported to us: A terrible bloody act occurred in our otherwise quiet little village. Yesterday morning at 10 o'clock, the 38-year-old farmer Augustin Wehrle, one of the largest farmers in the Linach valley, killed his wife Josefa, née Duffner, who was only 34 years old, with a knife in the neck, which opened the artery, and then killed himself with a shotgun blast. Wehrle had been a long-time heavy drinker and as a result his financial situation had declined considerably – his former assets are said to have amounted to over 100,000 marks. His wife had therefore applied for his incapacitation for drunkenness and tomorrow the witness hearing was to take place in Vöhrenbach before the Grand District Court of Villingen. Wehrle had given his sister Rosa, who lived in his second house here, notice to quit the apartment and she subsequently canceled her claim to him of 3,300 marks on January 1 for payment at home. As Wehrle no longer had any cash, his wife approached her father, who lived in Vöhrenbach, for this loan. On the 12th of March, he gave her the money in question and handed over another 100 marks for the family. Yesterday morning, when Mrs. Wehrle wanted to fix up the bedroom on the second floor, her husband must have demanded the money, because the servants working on the hayloft only heard that he was demanding money from the woman. As she had presumably refused to do so for well-known reasons, he must have given her the fatal stab. The 5½-year-old daughter, who was present, rushed into the living room on the second floor and shouted: "Father has killed mother"! While the maid rushed into the barn to tell the other servants, Wehrle went*

*downstairs, took the hunting rifle hanging on the wall, returned to the bedroom on the second floor and s h o t h i m s e l f in the left ear next to his wife's corpse. The district court of Villingen, which was present at the court day in Vöhrenbach, immediately went here to carry out the post-mortem examination and establish the facts of the case. On entering the bedroom, the onlooker was presented with a terrible sight. The woman was lying on the floor in front of the ransacked box, covered in blood, and not far from her was her husband, at whose feet lay the rifle with the fired cartridge case. Almost no part of the small room floor where one could set foot was free of blood. Pieces of the man's brain were clinging to the walls and ceiling. There were 24 hundred-mark bills and 980 marks in 20-mark pieces scattered on the floor and in the crib. This was a part of the 3,300 Mk. Wehrle had had one of his children fetch a bottle of schnapps on the morning of the murder and it was completely empty. He must have taken courage again after the murder, because the bottle of schnapps on the table on the second floor was stained with blood, as was the spot on the wall where the rifle had hung. An even more poignant impression was made by the group of eight underage children aged 1½ to 13 sitting at the table in the living room, who had suddenly become orphans in such a terrible way and who were not even able to comprehend the extent of this gruesome act. A l c o h o l has once again shown itself in its most terrible form and claimed blood victims as its prey.*

The orphans were moved to the surrounding farms and brought up there: Max, Otto, Elis (married name Muckle) and Anna (married name Niedermann) were at the Hermeshof, where their mother came from. Ernst, Franz and Amalia (married name Bürkle) lived on the Seppleshof, the farm directly adjacent to the Hermeshof. It is not known where the youngest child Josef (died of influenza in 1918) was accommodated.

The Wehrlehof, with an area of 92.4 hectares according to the auction record, was auctioned off by foreclosure on May 17, 1909 at the second auction date to Dr. Bernhard Wehrle, the son of the Gfelleibisen farmer Bernhard Wehrle and thus cousin of Augustin Wehrle, as the only bidder. The purchase price amounted to 63,100 marks, which corresponds to approximately € 450,000 [Deutsche Bundesbank].

Dr. Bernhard Wehrle was a doctor in Karlsruhe and had no plans to manage the farm by himself, but rather to lease it out [FAULER 1990: p.

166]. He had no children of his own, so after his death on August 29, 1938, the farm passed to his brother Mathäus Wehrle on the basis of the Reich inheritance law, after the younger brother Ignatz Wehrle, who had priority inheritance rights, had renounced the farm.

Mathäus Wehrle then immediately handed over the farm “due to age and illness” (he was 76 years old at the time) on April 21, 1939 to his nephew Alfred Wehrle, son of above-mentioned Ignatz Wehrle [Not. Furtw. H.72/39]. This rather unusual dual transfer was most probably following the laws of the time, which stipulated a certain order of succession. But it may also been intended to ensure that the transferee only had to pay a lower price. This so-called „Anschlag“, i.e. the price at which a farm is handed over to a descendent, was 35,000 Reichsmark (equivalent to around € 130,000 today) and was therefore significantly lower than the presumed market value at which Dr. Bernhard Wehrle had bought the farm at auction in 1909. In 1969, Alfred Wehrle handed the farm over to his son Edelbert Wehrle in exchange for a life estate for him. Today, the Wehrlehof is run by Edelbert’s son Detlef Wehrle.



## 1. Appendix

### Reprint from the Villingener Volksblatt

Linach, 14. Jan. (Mord und Selbstmord.) Es wird uns weiter gemeldet: Eine schreckliche Blutthat ereignete sich in unserm sonst so ruhigen Dörfchen. Gestern Vormittag 10 Uhr hatte der 38 Jahre alte Landwirt Augustin Wehrle, einer der größten Hofsauern im Linachtale, seine erst 34 Jahre alte Ehefrau Josefa geb. Duffner mit einem Steilmesser durch einen Stich in den Hals, welcher die Schlagader öffnete, und sodann sich selbst durch einen Gewehrschuß getötet. Wehrle war schon längere Zeit dem Trunke ergeben und infolgedessen in seinen Vermögensverhältnissen sehr zurück gekommen — sein Vermögen soll über 100 000 Mark betragen haben —. Seine Ehefrau hatte daher dessen Entmündigung wegen Trunksucht beantragt und morgen sollte in Böhrenbach die Zeugenvernehmung vor Großh. Amtsgerichte Villingen stattfinden. Wehrle hatte seiner Schwester Rosa, welche sein zweites Haus hier bewohnt, die Wohnung gekündigt und diese kündigte in der Folge ihre Forderung an ihn von 3000 Mark auf 1. Januar zur Heimzahlung. Da Wehrle keine Barmittel mehr besaß, ging seine Ehefrau hier in Böhrenbach wohnenden Vater um dieses Darlehen an. Am 12. ds. Mts. verabsolgte ihr dieser das verlangte Geld und händigte ihr weitere 100 Mark für die Familie aus. Gestern Vormittag nun, als Frau Wehrle das im zweiten Stock gelegene Schlafzimmer richten wollte, muß ihr Mann das Geld verlangt haben, denn die auf der Heubühne beschäftigten Diensthäten hörten nur, daß dieser von der Frau Geld verlangte. Da sie ihm solches vermutlich aus bekannten Gründen verweigert hatte, muß er ihr den tödlichen Stich versetzt haben. Das anwesende 5½ Jahre alte Töchterchen eilte in die im ersten Stock gelegene Wohnstube und rief: „Der Vater hat die Mutter tod gemacht!“ Während nun das

Dienstmädchen in die Scheuer eilte, um dies den übrigen Dienstboten mitzuteilen, ging Wehrle in den unteren Stock, nahm das an der Wand hängende Jagdgewehr, begab sich wieder in den zweiten Stock in das Schlafzimmer zurück und erschoss sich neben der Leiche seiner Ehefrau durch einen Schuß in das linke Ohr. Das gerade beim Gerichtstag in Böhrenbach anwesende Großh. Amtsgericht Billingen begab sich alsbald hierher, um die Leichenschau vorzunehmen und den Tatbestand festzustellen. Beim Betreten des Schlafzimmers bot sich dem Beschauer ein schrecklicher Anblick. Die Frau lag blutüberströmt vor dem durchwühlten Kasten entseelt am Boden und unweit von ihr ihr Ehemann, zu dessen Füßen sich das mit der abgeschossenen Patronenhülse befindliche Gewehr lag. Beinahe kein Plätzchen des kleinen Zimmerbodens, wohin man seinen Fuß setzen konnte, war von Blut frei. Von dem Gehirn des Mannes hingen Teile an den Wänden und der Zimmerdecke. Auf dem Boden und dem Kinderbettchen lagen 24 Stück Hundertmark-Scheine und 980 Mark in 20 Mark-Stücken wie gejät umher. Es war dies von den schon erwähnten 3300 Mk. Wehrle hatte noch am Morgen der Bluttat durch eines seiner Kinder eine Flasche Schnaps holen lassen und diese war bereits bis zur Reige geleert. Er muß sich nach vollbrachtem Morde nochmals Mut zugetrunken haben, denn die im ersten Stocke auf dem Tische stehende Schnapsflasche war mit Blut befleckt, ebenso die Stelle der Wand, an der das Gewehr gehangen hatte. Einen noch ergreifenderen Eindruck machte die in der Bohnstube am Tische sitzende Schar von acht unmündigen Kindern im Alter von 1½ bis 13 Jahren, welche auf so schreckliche Weise plötzlich zu Waisen geworden waren und welche die Tragweite dieser schauerlichen Tat noch nicht einmal zu übersehen vermochten. Der Alkohol hat sich wieder einmal in seiner schrecklichsten Art gezeigt und Blutopfer als seine Beute gefordert.

## 2. List of References

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