

Caroline Farner (1842–1913) & Anna Pfrunder (1851–1925)

Meta von Salis did the defence statement for Anna Pfrunder and Caroline Farner when they were accused of embezzlement / misappropriation of ward money in 1893 and had to stand in court. In doing so she told the story of how the two of them got to know each other, that they became friends for life and that no man nor woman had ever better understand to build up a more cosy and worthy family life than those two women. – Though not without delimiting this form of friendship from “one of the most appalling symptoms of degeneration of hyper culture” that sadly also carries the name “friendship”. With many words she explains the development of this special form of life of her friends, tells about their work loving and conscientious conduct of life of which the “chaste flower of friendship” springs.

The second female Swiss medical doctor and first female physician was able to build up a modest fortune with her practice despite free of charge treatment of poor people and extensive work in clubs on account of women. With this she created jealousy and she was not, as *Meta von Salis* encoded in one of her novels, gifted with a thorough knowledge of human nature. In every woman she only assumed the best of character, especially concerning their motives of their involvement in the women’s movement, so that quite often disappointment, rivalries and disputes occurred. *Meta von Salis* mentioned that, whoever knew Dr Farner only from passing by or from the club would not have seen her from her most charming side. “At a bedside, in a family of your choice, in short, wherever the most worthy characteristics of humans come to light instead of the official and sparkling, you have to watch her – if you want to value and love her.”

The investigation by general judge Wittelsbach – part in the case Pfrunder against Wittelsbach and judge in one – which was followed by a long custody and a late trial which proved the two women not guilty was traumatic for the whole of the women’s movement, the smear campaign was exemplary.

And to the contrary to the acquittal of Caroline Farner and Anna Pfrunder as well as her mother, which had also been taken into custody, *Meta von Salis* got a sentence because of insult for her defence statement.

From the diary of Caroline Farner:

“ September 13th [1892]: I’m counting the hours until the morning; because my bad back hurts quite a lot. But god gave me the peace of a clear conscience. That much I am ahead of my persecutors.

September 14th: Thank god I could get some rest on me bed of straw. I'm bright and cheery and – after my morning prayer in which I included my Anna and our mother /.../ and would also not forget my patients and the free world – turn straight to the order of the room and to the mental work.

4pm: It is, thank god, over: The disgrace to be walked through town by the police in broad daylight! But oh, the unimaginable disgrace which the N. Züricher-Zeitung with its spiteful article did to me and which wanders out into the wide world! This also I have to – great god – go through. For a couple of years in never go to bed without asking myself: Didn't you make any mistakes, not an error, or carelessness? I'm far from perfection but I strive for it coming closer to my great model and being able to say: "Lord forgive me, they know not what they do – – Yes, god shall forgive but nowhere is written that humankind is supposed to rot out the bad. – – But this blot on my honour – is simply killing me. – – It has become dark. – Good night, beloved Anna, dear mother! the almighty takes care of you, in you hand, good lord, I lay the fate of my patients. Our two poor, heavily suffering through my misery, how pale and sick they look, heaven comfort them! To you ever merciful god I give myself into your hands! –¹

October 12th: The morning is chilly and wet. Under pouring rain I am escorted into Selnau, my two trusting friends waiting in this rain pale, careworn in the street to not at me while passing by. Last night they faithfully accompanied me up to the main door of the prison. – Today they are here at all hours in heavy weather, sacrificing their health, their life to the god of friendship. The almighty bless them."²

Those two faithful friends – “right after A. Pfrunder very close friends to the doctor”, as Ida Bindschedler wrote – are *Pauline Bindschedler* and *Hedwig Kym*. Since there is only little known about those, Rosemarie Keller in her Farner novel invented two other close friend for Caroline Farner. Those relationships are displayed very convincing. Sadly, by doing so, the two “real” friends move even further out of eye's range.

Anna Pfrunder and Caroline Farner lived together for 32 years, eventually in their own house, the Villa Ehrenberg, Rämistrasse 26. Until her own death the remaining partner lived in this house. Then the Villa Ehrenberg – by wish of Caroline Farner as Anna Pfrunder wrote in her will – became, to one half as a gift and the other by being bought, property of the Zurich section of the Lyceum club. Furthermore they established a foundation to support female students and Meta von Salis (14), Pauline Bindschedler (36) and Hedwig Feigenwinter-Kym (37) got a reasonable sum “as a sign of memory and thankfulness”.

¹ (p 49/50)

At the Hohe Promenade, close to her house, Caroline Farner was honoured according to city council's decision by naming a path after her in 1999.

Anna Rosina Pfrunder was a single child from the second marriage of her father, constructing engineer Johannes Pfrunder, and Anna Schelling. When she was 35 she lived in the same house with her parents and her friend Caroline Farner since five years ago. Thus the peace of their home was disturbed and Caroline Farner moved out. Following this, the children bring trouble because they lack the authority of the doctor. Only Mrs Pfrunder-Schelling is happy. But her peace is disturbed because Anna “/feels/ so righteous with her friend (MD F.) so that sometimes I fear the worst. However it is faithful to her until they die” she wrote to a friend. And going on: “You cannot imagine how sad life goes on here. I wanted to save my children from this bad ghost that now obviously has moved out of our rooms, but has moved even deeper into Anna's heart. – Oh, everything would be just fine now if Anna would not have become so bad and angry. It does not talk to me all day ...”³

Anna with her niece moved in with Caroline Farner. After the guardianship was passed from her father onto the uncle of those children, judge Albert Wittelsbach, with the latter's consent also the nephew is placed with the two women. Then Wittelsbach changed his mind. The women applied for guardianship for the two children which is turned down: “Since it has been proved that by interference of Miss MD Farner into the family and matters of Pfrunder this family came into trouble, - their own daughter Anna had estranged herself from their father and mother, both infirm and frail, *to cuddle up with a strange person and to live with this person /emphasised/* – the office for orphans cannot have any faith that those two women can give the two children a proper upbringing.”⁴

Also an application for adoption was turned down. In the meantime the whole family Pfrunder was reconciled because it became more and more clear that Wittelsbach did not focus on the wellbeing of the children but on their wealth. The police took the children of the home Farner/Pfrunder, the two women were prohibited any contact with them officially.

When Johannes Pfrunder died, guardian Wittelsbach, now a high court judge, did not agree with the statutory portion, that was granted to his wards. He started legal proceedings and got Caroline Farner, Anna Pfrunder and Anna Pfrunder-Schelling into custody with the reason being danger of conflict of interests.

² Med. Dr. Caroline Farner, p 53

³ quoted from Chratz & Quer, p 303 f

The press sprang into action: From the *Neue Züricher Zeitung (NZZ)* to the yellow pages the whole process was prejudged. Most of all Caroline Farner being a doctor and feminist was treated badly.

Mrs Pfrunder-Schelling could leave the court in Selnau after three weeks of custody, her daughter four weeks later. At the same time Caroline Farner was let out of prison Oetenbach. One year later the trial follows in which all three of them were cleared of suspicion.

The *Philanthropin* published a commemorative edition. In this the whole story was told and as a resume Meta von Salis-Marschlins stated, that only the universal right to vote and suffrage for women could prevent such cases in the future. Up to that time the Bünden aristocrat had not been an advocate for a universal right to vote – neither for women nor for men –, since she did not believe the general public being educable and was sceptical concerning all democratic tendencies. Now she claimed “that women have to be employed in government, court, police, prison authorities, in short, wherever women’s interest are concerned”.

From all over the country and abroad women congratulated for the acquittal, a long list was printed in the magazine and was completed in the following edition. Among these many – including most famous members of the German women’s movement – also were *Clara Willdenow* (35) from Jena, where she spent part of her time as an assistant, Mrs Fürspreh *Aebi-Exsoldt* (38) from Bern, her (41) mother Bertha from Munich, where she ran a photographic studio and *Ida and Pauline Bindschedler* from Zurich as well as from Cologne her half sister Emma, who was a painter and furthermore from Zurich *Hedwig Kym’s* mother, Mrs Prof. Kym-Biedermann with her daughters Emma and Hedwig.

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For further reading: - [Ida Bindschedler]: Med. Dr. Caroline Farner, 1842 – 1913, Zürich 1913; - Chratz & Quer. Sieben Frauenstadtrundgänge in Zürich, Limmat Verlag, Zürich 1995, p 268, 270/71, 277,302 – 307; - Rosemarie Keller: Ich bereue nicht einen meiner Schritte. Leben und Prozess der Ärztin Caroline Farner. Roman, Pendo Verlag, Zürich 2001.

Sources: - Bertha Kollbrunner: Frl. Anna Pfrunder. In: Zentralblatt des Schweizerischen gemeinnützigen Frauenvereins, No 10, October 20th 1925, p 231/32 (Schweizerische Landesbibliothek Bern).

⁴ At the same place as above, p 304

Proposal for quotation

Author name, author first name year: text. Ingeborg Boxhammer/Christiane Leidinger: online-project
lesbian history. translation by translator first name name (year).
URL:<<http://www.lesbengeschichte.de>>