

# The First Waldorf Teachers

## Historical Vignettes

*Tomáš Zdražil*

*The following selection is taken from Tomáš Zdražil's book, The First Waldorf Teachers: Twelve Vignettes of Leaders at the Original School, recently published by Waldorf Publications in a translation by Jan Kees Saltet. The book offers brief sketches of the team of educators that launched the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart under the direction of Rudolf Steiner. This selection is reproduced here with the kind permission of Waldorf Publications.*

### E. A. Karl Stockmeyer



Next to Emil Molt, the founder of the Waldorf School, and Rudolf Steiner, the school's leader, there was a third person who filled a highly important role: that of an administrator. It was E. A. Karl Stockmeyer who took on that task. He was 33 years old at the time, and was trained

as a natural scientist. Among anthroposophists, he was the one teacher who, after World War I, was working in the public domain dealing with matters of educational policy.

From the end of the war in 1918, Stockmeyer had been working to develop original educational ideas based on Rudolf Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom* and later impulses Steiner had given, ideas that could be implemented to rebuild the German educational system. Stockmeyer published several papers on the subject.

In January 1919, Emil Molt asked Stockmeyer to help in the founding of an independent school in Stuttgart. Stockmeyer first imagined he would be a consultant in the planning process of the school, but things took a different turn when Steiner accepted the position of school leader. At his request, Stockmeyer changed his plans at the end of April 1919 and asked for a leave of absence from his state school in order to join the faculty of the Stuttgart school.

In designing a curriculum, it was quite a struggle for him to work with Steiner's ideas, since it meant letting go of conventions and drawing up something original and uninfluenced by state curricula. It was also hard for him to imagine anything other than a classical state school schedule. But he adjusted. He also took on the task of finding the future group of colleagues, and in July he embarked on a "voyage of discovery" to find the first circle of Waldorf teachers. Rudolf Steiner jokingly said he should go "collect the stars".

In August 1919, Stockmeyer and his family relocated to Stuttgart and moved into an apartment in the new school building. He took on organizing the preparatory course for the new cohort of teachers and all subsequent faculty courses; getting the building ready as well as furniture and school supplies, making the schedule, leading the faculty meetings, communicating with the school officials, and carrying the entire administration of the school.

In his teaching tasks, Stockmeyer focused on the natural sciences of the upper grades. Many subjects in the areas of "practical arts and technology", such as surveying, were introduced into the curriculum by him. He took care of communication between Steiner and the faculty, always maintaining an extraordinarily sovereign position towards him: "His very posture showed this during faculty meetings, where he would be sitting with his hand supporting his chin, weighing every word and pondering it."

Rudolf Steiner was eager for Stockmeyer to earn a PhD, just like Herbert Hahn. But, with all he had to do, this was out of the question. Stockmeyer put all his scientific interests and questions on the back burner for the sake of administering the school, putting his whole life at the disposal of the practical and administrative

side of founding the school. We owe it to him that the organizational miracle of the school's founding succeeded and that ties to the local authorities were consistently good.

In addition, the administering of the fledgling Waldorf School Association (the organization responsible for financing the school) rested largely on Stockmeyer's shoulders. During the economic crisis years of 1922/23, he wrote several hundred letters seeking help from sponsors, both inside and outside of Germany. Who knows if the school would have survived if he hadn't done all that work? [...]

Stockmeyer remained faithful to the school until it was forced to close in 1938, at which time he steadfastly carried through the administrative aspect of the closure procedures. Then he had to write an application letter for a teacher's position. "The work in the Waldorf School, which was led until 1925 by Rudolf Steiner, the most eminent German philosopher, spiritual researcher, and a trailblazing educator, has given me unbelievably strong and fruitful impulses and experiences I couldn't have gained in any other way, all of which I feel obliged to make fruitful for public education for the remainder of my life," he wrote. This was an honest and singularly courageous letter to write in 1940. A political assessment, drawn up around the same time by the NSDAP [National Socialist Party], stated: "Stockmeyer was a fanatical anthroposophist. He played a dominant part in the anthroposophical leadership of the Waldorf School, was a member of the Waldorf School Council, and headed the 100 Waldorf Ortsgruppen [local school groups throughout Germany to fund the Waldorf schools]. He took a sharp stance against National Socialism, even after the party came to power. He is chiefly responsible for the negative position taken by the Waldorf School faculty. Both philosophically and politically, he is to be rejected, and would be unsuitable as a teacher." Nevertheless, he managed to secure a teacher's position in Königfeld, but his entire anthroposophical library was seized by the Gestapo. After 1945, he helped found the first Waldorf school in Freiburg. He was also responsible for the first systematic outline of the Waldorf elementary school curriculum. In retirement he continued to work on questions of epistemology and Waldorf pedagogy until his death in 1963.

### Caroline von Heydebrand



In June 1919, Caroline von Heydebrand [...] applied for a position at the Waldorf School. She was 32 years old at the time and was about to get her PhD at the University of Greifswald. Von Heydebrand, who came from an aristocratic family in Silesia, was broadly educated; she was well-versed in the

classics, spoke several foreign languages, and was thoroughly steeped in anthroposophy.

Rudolf Steiner entrusted the fifth grade to her, which, with 47 students, was the biggest class in the school. She was delicately built and small of stature. Some of her students were as tall as she was! Her voice was so thin and high-pitched that it was hard for her at the beginning to establish herself in her teacher role. Her class consisted of a mixture of children from all kinds of different types of school and social background. Children of the workers at the Waldorf Astoria factory sat next to Felix Goll, the adopted son of the rich factory owner and founder of the school Emil Molt, something which was unheard of at the time. At the beginning of the school year there was no school furniture so the students sat on chairs left over from the days when the building had housed a restaurant, skidding around on the polished floors. One can hardly imagine a more challenging situation for a young, beginning teacher who began without teacher training or classroom experience.

But von Heydebrand met the challenge with characteristic intensity, tenacity, and artistry. She introduced the children to Greek culture, telling them stories from mythology and using sculptures for illustrations. She told them about the Greek gods and heroes, and had them draw Greek motives to go with the stories. She soon succeeded in winning the children's hearts, and they called her "Fräulein Doktor".

Right after the war, there were enormous differences in skill levels among the students, both in German language and in mathematics, which presented her with considerable challenges. However, she had a thorough command of the material, both because she was highly educated and because she prepared assiduously; in short order she made great strides,

especially because she was able to penetrate everything with great imagination.

She paired meticulous lesson planning with sensitive child observations. In addition, she began early on to write pedagogical publications containing highly detailed reflections based on her classroom experience. Steiner was able to observe her classes and often singled her out for praise in his lectures on the new art of education, holding her up as an example of how to integrate anthroposophical insights. She often accompanied him on his lecture tours to England, which felt like a second home to her.

In this way von Heydebrand became a master of the new art of education and devoted her whole life to it. She wrote a number of artistic texts to be used in the classroom, put together readers, edited the first magazine devoted to Waldorf pedagogy, wrote articles, gave lectures, and trained new teachers. Spurred on by Rudolf Steiner, she gained a thorough knowledge of the pedagogical renewal efforts prevalent in Germany at the time, drawing attention to their narrow focus on cognitive development, and observing how little such theories were able to contribute to a healthy and living practice in the classroom.

Three classes had the great pleasure of having her as their class teacher. In 1935 she felt compelled to step back from teaching due to health reasons, political pressures, and tensions within the faculty. She died in the summer of 1938 after the Stuttgart school had been closed by the National Socialists, who had already banned her publications. She can truly be called one of the most eminent pioneers of Waldorf pedagogy, both because of her outstanding pedagogical contributions and her publications.

### Elisabeth and Paul Baumann



In addition to eight class teachers, Rudolf Steiner invited four subject teachers to be part of the team that was summoned to Stuttgart to build up the new school. First among these specialist teachers were Paul and Elisabeth Baumann. From day one, they dedicated themselves fully to the task of shaping the arts curriculum.

Paul Baumann, born in 1889, attended the grammar school in Karlsruhe, where he met E.A. Karl Stockmeyer, who would later introduce him to anthroposophy. Baumann worked as a music conductor at several German theaters before World War I, and after completing military service, he landed in Zürich, where he joined the anthroposophical movement for the threefold social organism. There he met Elisabeth Dollfuss, a eurythmist eight years his junior, whom he married on the last day of the preparatory course for Waldorf teachers, just before the festive opening of the Stuttgart school.

Elisabeth, who grew up in an anthroposophical family, spent a number of years in anthroposophical circles in Munich. There she studied eurythmy with Lory Smits and was soon giving courses herself. As a 24-year-old, she would become the youngest member of the faculty of Waldorf teachers.

The pair was like a living picture of the manner in which the arts—in their case music and eurythmy—could be married in Waldorf education. “Everyone was overjoyed, and wished the couple well from the bottom of their hearts” (Emil Molt). From then on, they both devoted themselves with great energy to the task of building up the music and eurythmy curriculum, permeating the school with art. This started right from the moment of the opening celebration, for which Paul played music by J. S. Bach and Elisabeth performed eurythmy. They were the center of all the monthly assemblies and Christmas celebrations.

Paul Baumann composed the majority of the musical contributions himself. Right from the beginning, he also started writing about the pedagogical aims of the school. He lectured about the place of eurythmy and music in the new art of education, for example on October 1920 at the first anthroposophical “Hochschulkurs” [advanced course] in Dornach. His lasting contribution, however, is the body of musical compositions he wrote for the new school, including many songs which arose from a revolutionary, new musical impulse. The songs pointed the way to original creation, springing from entirely sovereign sources.

There were no existing school traditions upon which Baumann could build. He composed songs with courage and verve, basing himself on anthroposophical insights and the impulse of freedom that permeated the new pedagogy and art of education. His compositions “were meant to join in the growing chorus with which we appeal to all human beings, striving to save education from being stifled by restrictions imposed by political parties of the state.... These songs could only arise in independent schools, in consonance with a curriculum which couples practical aims for everyday life with the true demands of education as recognized by Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy, and the psychological insights resulting from it. These songs could only come into being within a collaborative group of teachers who never ceased to work on themselves in order to throw off tendencies of narrowmindedness or abstract prescriptions imposed by conventional pedagogical theories. When these songs succeed in breathing something of the spirit of the Waldorf school, and if listeners are touched by that breath, the songs will have fulfilled their mission.” [...]

Baumann’s wife Elisabeth was not only the first eurythmist to develop pedagogical eurythmy alongside artistic eurythmy. She also observed that many children had health problems after the war or needed help to overcome hindrances in their development. This prompted her to ask Rudolf Steiner to give indications for hygienic and therapeutic applications of eurythmy, which in turn led to the therapeutic eurythmy course given in Dornach in 1921. It is thanks to her initiative that we now have therapeutic eurythmy.

Paul and Elisabeth Baumann worked at the Waldorf school in Stuttgart until 1937, right up to a few months before it had to close its doors. At that point, they retired from teaching and spent the rest of their lives in France and Switzerland.

### Walter Johannes Stein

The festive celebration of September 7, 1919 also marked the end of the preparatory course for the new cohort of teachers, and participants who had not been assigned a task by Rudolf Steiner the day before were preparing to return to their previous occupations.

This was the situation that Walter Johannes Stein, 28 years old at the time, found himself in. Like Caroline von Heydebrand, he had just completed his last doctoral examinations a few weeks before in Vienna. Indeed, he was the first to write a dissertation about Rudolf Steiner. Next to philosophy, Stein had studied mathematics and

physics. He had also put a great deal of effort into promoting the movement for social threefolding in Vienna during the spring and summer of 1919. He had pleaded with Rudolf Steiner for permission to take part in the teachers course in Stuttgart, to which he had not at first been invited. After the ceremony on the 7th, Stein was literally plucked from the street in front of the school by E. A. Karl Stockmeyer, who gave him the assignment from Rudolf Steiner to serve as a substitute teacher. Stein must have been overjoyed to be asked, and he was inwardly prepared to give his all to this new task.

Stein spent the first weeks in grade one, substituting for Leonie von Mirbach, the first grade teacher. By the end of November 1919, however, it became clear that Rudolf Treichler, who alternated with E. A. Karl Stockmeyer in teaching grades 7 and 8, had to focus all his efforts on teaching foreign languages. Though a natural scientist by training, Walter Johannes Stein now had to teach German and history. With characteristic zeal, he strove to penetrate the subjects which were foreign territory for him up to then, and he taught them brilliantly. [...] In the early years, Rudolf Steiner singled him and Caroline von Heydebrand out for praise for his ability to imbue his lesson material with anthroposophical understanding.

Stein combined teaching with an extensive lecturing schedule; he was also a prolific anthroposophical author. The themes he covered were many: in addition to educational topics in the context of contemporary politics, Waldorf pedagogy, and history, he also lectured on anthroposophy and Rudolf Steiner’s work. Stein also set himself the task of protecting Rudolf Steiner against numerous attacks from various quarters. He did it with expertise, courage, and verbal acumen that were unbeatable, even feared.

Working together with a faculty of highly gifted and anthroposophically trained colleagues—Herbert Hahn and Caroline von Heydebrand, to name but two—was a source of great happiness for Stein. His good friends and fellow students from Vienna, Eugen Kolisko and Hermann von Baravalle, soon joined the Stuttgart school, much to his delight.

After a short time, however, Stein went through a deep professional and personal crisis, which was compounded by the many extra activities he had taken on. Instead of really teaching, he tended to lecture, holding high school students captive by propounding anthroposophical theses. This led to estrangement in the high school and discipline problems. Rudolf Steiner was upset and

criticized Stein just as unsparingly as he had praised him two years before for his exemplary teaching.

Stein was shocked about himself and questioned his own capacity as a teacher. Two elements sustained him through this crisis: a boundless devotion to Rudolf Steiner's authority and an iron will. This combination helped him to overcome what he had to face and made him a brilliant teacher again.

After the death of Rudolf Steiner—news of which he had to bring to the faculty—Stein went through a very difficult time involving many tensions and conflicts as people struggled with the question of how to continue anthroposophical work and uphold the life of the Anthroposophical Society. Stein felt compelled to take an uncompromising stance, which often led to polarization. In the end, he left Germany in 1932 and moved to England. He did not work as a teacher there, however, but as a journalist, lecturer, and coordinator. Surprisingly, he developed therapeutic capacities and worked as a curative practitioner until his death in London in 1957.

### Elisabeth von Grunelius

Rudolf Steiner had invited Elisabeth von Grunelius, whom he had known since 1914, to be the first kindergarten teacher. She was a delicate young lady who had come to Dornach to work on the carving of the capitals of the first Goetheanum when she was 19 years old. Born in Alsace, she had completed the Comenius kindergarten seminar in Bonn in 1914, and wanted to go on from there to study psychology. After a year and a half in Dornach, she took a leave of absence and went to Berlin in order to do a practicum for kindergarten, nursery, and social work in order to obtain her diploma in the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Seminar, which would qualify her to train students.

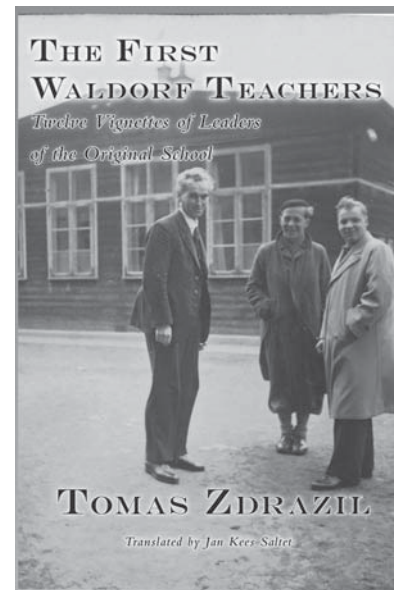
After the war, she returned to Alsace, which by then had become French territory. When Rudolf Steiner asked her to join the faculty of the first Waldorf school, she came, but worked only as a substitute teacher for some time. Rudolf Steiner frequently mentions how difficult it was to fit a kindergarten into the existing configuration of the school grounds. As late as April 1923, Steiner is recorded as saying in one of the faculty meetings that “we can't even think of a kindergarten at the present time”.

During the second year of the school's existence, Elisabeth assisted Leonie von Mirbach by taking over the second half of main lesson. In the third school year, that class of 52 children was split into two, and she took

one half (3b). After one year of that, she left to study eurythmy and painting in Dornach.

It was only in 1924 that the school managed to carve out a place to build the kindergarten, tucked in a far corner of the playground. This was largely due to the energetic efforts of Herbert Hahn, and the kindergarten was ready for occupancy in 1926. From then on, Elisabeth von Grunelius built up the kindergarten. Since Steiner had died in 1925, she didn't have his direct indications during the initial build-up phase, so it was she who outlined the original foundations of the kindergarten work in the Waldorf school. Later she went on to found the international Waldorf kindergarten movement. She died in 1989, at age 94, the last member of the original faculty at the Stuttgart school.

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