

1863: the creation of the first National Society at the beginning of the Movement's history

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Would it not be possible, in time of peace and quiet, to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime by zealous, devoted and thoroughly qualified volunteers?¹

We all know by heart the story of Henry Dunant being shocked by what he experienced when coming to the region of Solferino in Northern Italy just after the battle between Austrian and French soldiers on 24 June 1859. We also know that the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 150 years ago and the drafting of the original Geneva Convention are both rooted in Dunant's memories of what he experienced in Solferino.

What is perhaps less known is the fact that Dunant's idea to form relief societies, presented in his book *A Memory of Solferino*, was first followed in the German region of Baden-Württemberg. Back then, it was the State of Württemberg under King Wilhelm I.² Documents prove that in December 1863 the first organisation under the emblem of the Red Cross outside of Geneva was founded in Stuttgart.³ The history of the German Red Cross is, to a large extent, the history of

its local branches.⁴ To get an impression of the commitment of the stakeholders of the south-western German regions during the creation of the first National Societies, let us have a closer look at the main figures and their individual endeavours.

During the creation process in Württemberg, one man stands out: Dr Christoph Ulrich Hahn. Born 1805 in Stuttgart, Hahn became a Protestant priest and worked as a teacher. He was literate and was published at an early age. Hahn often travelled to Geneva to see his brother Karl, who ran a pharmacy there, and to get fresh scientific input for his publications. In addition, Hahn was active in the field of public welfare and was chair of the local public welfare association, the Württembergische Wohltätigkeitsverein.⁵ Later the Württembergische Sanitätsverein emerged from this public welfare association, and eventually the first National Red Cross Society was created.

Amongst Hahn's friends we find Paul Appia, another priest. He is the father of Louis Appia, who opened a surgery in Geneva and in 1859 voluntarily worked on the battlefield in Northern Italy, in various field hospitals in Turin, Milan, Brescia, and Desenzano del Garda, for some time. Hahn first learnt about Henry Dunant via Crown Princess Olga and Grand Princess Helene Pawlowna, with whom he kept regular contact. These women met Dunant on various occasions. Dunant also first sent his book *A Memory of Solferino* to their courts; this was very much appreciated. Following this, Dunant visited these courts and announced the upcoming international meeting which was planned for 26 October 1863. Gustav Moynier, the chairman of the Geneva Society for Public Welfare, had given notice of Dunant's visit in advance via mail. Such a letter by Moynier also reached Dr Hahn in Stuttgart, who was in touch with Moynier concerning the exchange of publications between the Württembergische Wohltätigkeitsverein and Geneva.⁶ The invitation to the international meeting had already been accepted before Dunant even arrived in Stuttgart.

Together with Dr Hahn from Stuttgart, two other men from the south-west of Germany were to come to this first international meeting in Geneva. One of them was Dr Adolf Steiner, a medic of the Grand Duke regiment. He participated in the

1 Henry Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino*, English version, ICRC, Geneva, 1939, p. 115.

2 King Wilhelm I died in 1864 and was succeeded by King Karl I.

3 For further details, see below. 'Liste des Comités Centraux, d'après l'ordre chronologique de leur fondation', in *Bulletin international de la Croix-Rouge*, No. 15, April 1973, p. 137; Walter Gruber, *125 Jahre Rotes Kreuz*, Schwaikheim, 1988. Crucial inventories relating to the time from the creation of the first organisation until the end of World War II of the specific archive in Potsdam-Babelsberg went missing or were scattered due to disturbances at the archive at the end of World War II. Alfred Quellmalz even dates the creation of the first organisation back to 12 November 1863; see Alfred Quellmalz, *Dr Christoph Ulrich Hahn, Lebensbilder aus Schwaben und Franken*, Stuttgart, 1962, p. 197; see also Arnold Weller, *Sozialgeschichte Südwestdeutschlands*, Stuttgart, 1979, p. 182; Walter Gruber, 'Baden-Württemberg: eine Wiege des Roten Kreuzes in Deutschland', in *Hundert Jahre im Dienst der Menschlichkeit*, Deutsches Rotes Kreuz Schriftenreihe, Bonn, No. 30, 1963, p. 99.

4 For more detailed information see 'Baden-Württemberg', in W. Gruber, above note 3.

5 This association had emanated from the Central Foundation for Poverty Relief, which Queen Katharina of Württemberg created in 1817. As chair of the Württembergische Sanitätsverein, Hahn was in contact with Gustave Moynier, president of the Geneva Society for Public Welfare (*la Société genevoise d'utilité publique*) at that time. See *ibid.*, p. 102.

6 *Ibid.*



Figure 1. Dr Christoph Ulrich Hahn of the Württemberg Central Foundation for Poverty Relief, representing Württemberg in the International Conferences of 1863 and 1864. Hahn attended the 1863 International Conference as the delegate for Württemberg and was Ambassador Plenipotentiary to the 1864 conference. © ICRC photo library (DR).

conferences from 1863 until 1868 as authorised delegate for the Grand Duchy of Baden. The second was Dr Ernst Rudolf Wagner, a priest. Dr Wagner accompanied Dr Hahn to represent the Waiblinger local charity association. Later Wagner published a German translation of the book *A Memory of Solferino*, together with a report about the First Geneva Conference.⁷

After having received Dunant's book and in fact after Dunant had approached the courts in person, the interest of Germany in participating in the October 1863 International Conference organised by the newly founded ICRC (originally called 'Permanent International Committee for the Relief of Wounded Soldiers') in Geneva was immense. Nine delegates from the dynasties of Baden, Bavaria, Hesse, Prussia (sending three delegates), Saxonia, Hanover, and Württemberg participated.⁸ Overall at the meeting in Geneva, 36 participants,

7 In 1876, Dr Wagner would offer Dunant a home when the latter was poor and very much in need.

8 See Walter Gruber, *Das Rote Kreuz in Deutschland*, Wiesbaden, 1985, pp. 14 ff.



Figure 2. The Geneva International Conference, August 1864, with the names of those taking part and their countries of origin. © ICRC photo library (DR)/Boissonnas, Frédéric.

including 18 official delegates from 14 states,⁹ gathered and drafted ten Guidelines which stated, among other things, the function of voluntary relief societies that were to be created as a follow-up to the meeting.

What role did Drs Hahn, Steiner, and Wagner play at the Geneva International Conference from 26 to 29 October 1863? These three delegates asserted, especially during the negotiations and drafting process concerning the first article, that in every state that joined the agreement, a national committee should be established which should endeavour to rectify the insufficiency of army medical services. Dr Steiner opposed the proposal to extend such a national committee to an international one if need be. The reason for his concerns was the assumption that some governments might mistrust and oppose such a regulation. In addition, Steiner proposed to speak of a ‘central committee’ instead of a ‘national committee’, because he did not consider it a good idea to have as many different national committees as there were sovereign states within Germany at that time. Already

9 Baden, Bavaria, France, Great Britain, Hanover, Hesse-Darmstadt, Italy, The Netherlands, Austria, Prussia, Russia, Saxony, Sweden, and Spain. There were also six delegates of various associations, seven unofficial foreign participants, and the five members of the ICRC.



Figure 3. Dr Adolf Steiner, Medical Officer, representative of Baden at the Geneva International Conferences of 1863 and 1864. © ICRC photo library (DR).

back then, Steiner recognised the problems arising around the question of who would represent Germany at the Diplomatic Conference in Geneva in August 1864 that would adopt the original Geneva Convention. Should it be the German Confederation¹⁰ only, or representatives of the individual states? At the end of the day, the wording of the regulation did not clearly define the committees to be created, either as ‘central’ or as ‘national’.

Dr Steiner also took a firm stand during the discussions on the issue of whether voluntary relief personnel on the battlefield should be incorporated directly into the armed forces. According to Steiner, the voluntary nature of their service might have been jeopardized through such incorporation. Steiner was against absolute regulation that left no freedom for these personnel, and felt that this should be reflected in the wording of the regulation. He thus proposed the negotiated wording to be that voluntary relief personnel ‘can’ rather than ‘should’ or ‘must’ establish hospitals.¹¹ During the negotiations on the drafting process, Steiner was backed by Dr Louis Appia on this point.

10 For the Member States of the German Confederation see the list at German Historical Museum, available at: www.dhm.de/lemo/html/reaktion/deutscherbund.

11 W. Gruber, ‘Baden-Württemberg’, above note 3, pp. 108 ff.

All three delegates from the south-west of Germany were deeply affected by the atmosphere and development of the meeting, though from the record of the meeting, one would not assume that it was Dr Hahn rather than Dr Steiner who stood out when it came to the implementation of the meeting results. Already within two weeks after the meeting had ended, on 12 November 1863, Dr Hahn reported to the Württembergische Wohltätigkeitsverein about the events in Geneva. According to the official record, Dr Hahn said it was adopted by consensus that, in view of the current devastating warfare, the official medical services were insufficient, that only through additional private companies could this status be resolved, and that for this purpose the whole medical service should receive the status of inviolability and be protected through a specific emblem.¹² Medical personnel as well as hospitals were to be regarded as neutral. Furthermore, he reported that the urgent wish was expressed in Geneva to create associations on the national level in every state which in times of peace would prepare for the care of the wounded by training personnel and providing equipment. The governing board of the Württembergische Wohltätigkeitsverein asked Dr Hahn to put his words on paper and immediately submit the document to King Wilhelm I for his approval. The king inspected Hahn's report 'with interest'.¹³

Dr Hahn also informed the general public about the meeting, describing the engagement of Dr Steiner and highlighting activities in other countries, such as the Baden Women's Association (*Badischer Frauenverein*)¹⁴ and the activities of the American Medical Commission during the American Civil War at that time.¹⁵ He recommended that such voluntary aid societies could also be of great assistance in the case of epidemics, accidents, floods, disasters, and fires.¹⁶ In this regard, Dr Hahn went even further than Dunant, who proposed in his *Memory of Solferino*: 'Societies of this kind, once formed and their permanent existence assured, would ... be always organized and ready for the possibility of war'.¹⁷

In addition, Hahn printed the ten articles of the resolution adopted at the International Conference. He sent this printed copy, encompassing 16 pages, to all authorities and local charity organisations.¹⁸ In addition, he informed Dunant about his activities by sending him a private note.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

13 *Ibid.*

14 The *Badischer Frauenverein* was created 6 June 1859 in Karlsruhe by Grand Duchess Luise von Baden, and formally acknowledged by the ICRC on 29 June 1866. From the start, however, it worked in the same sense as it did after the formal acknowledgment by the ICRC, in the sense of being a Red Cross Society. Furthermore, the Grand Duchy of Baden was the first German state to ratify the Geneva Convention on 16 December 1864, while the Kingdom of Württemberg followed on 2 June 1866. Baden was the ninth state on the whole to ratify the Convention.

15 W. Gruber, 'Baden-Württemberg', above note 3, p. 111.

16 A. Quellmalz, above note 3, p. 197; W. Gruber, 'Baden-Württemberg', above note 3, p. 111. There is no surviving documentation detailing any direct reactions on this proposal from the relevant authorities.

17 'The work itself would consist in bringing aid and relief (in agreement with the military commissaries, i.e., when necessary with their support and under their instructions) onto the battlefield whenever battle was joined, and subsequently to continue to care for the wounded in the hospitals until their convalescence was complete': H. Dunant, above note 1, p. 117.

18 To what extent this attracted public interest is not known.

26 Octobre. Cette proposition avait été remise à la 4^e section du Congrès, composée en partie de médecins militaires, pour qu'elle en fit un rapport à l'Assemblée générale. Ce rapport a été très-sympathique à cette question; et le rapporteur de la 4^e section, qui se trouvait être justement M. le Docteur Basting, chirurgien-major des Pays-Bas, traducteur de « *Un Souvenir de Solferino* », et qui connaissait à fond le plan proposé, l'a développé à l'Assemblée et a invité les membres du Congrès à se rendre à la conférence de Genève le 26 Octobre.

Les conclusions de la 4^e section ont été adoptées à l'unanimité avec des marques de vive approbation.

En conséquence de l'accueil favorable fait à son plan dans le Congrès de Statistique, le Comité de Genève propose, en outre du projet de Concordat :

1^o Que chaque Gouvernement de l'Europe daigne accorder Sa Protection spéciale et Son haut Patronage au Comité général national qui doit être créé dans chacune des capitales de l'Europe, et qui sera composé des personnes les plus honorables et les plus estimées.

2^o Que ces mêmes Gouvernements déclarent que désormais, le *personnel médical militaire* et ceux qui en dépendent, y compris les *secoureurs volontaires reconnus*, seront regardés comme personnes *neutres* par les puissances belligérantes.

3^o Que, en temps de guerre, les Gouvernements s'engagent à faciliter les moyens de transport du personnel et des provisions charitables que ces Sociétés enverront dans les pays envahis par la guerre.

Enfin, le Comité de Genève désire que la Conférence Internationale étudie et discute les moyens de réaliser cette œuvre éminemment humanitaire et philanthropique tout en respectant les lois, les habitudes et les usages des différentes nations de l'Europe.

Figure 4. Notification to the International Conference of 26 October 1863. Letter by Henry Dunant dated 15 September 1863. © ICRC photo library (DR).

How speedily Dr Hahn advanced is proven by a letter sent by the privy councillor of the King's Cabinet to Dr Hahn on 5 December 1863.¹⁹ That very day in Stuttgart, Dr Hahn established a creation committee composed of both women

19 W. Gruber, 'Baden-Württemberg', above note 3, pp. 112 ff.

and men.²⁰ It drafted the statutes for a new society, which were announced to the steering committee of the Württembergische Wohltätigkeitsverein in its session on 11 January 1864.²¹ The Württemberg Ministry for Warfare had already given its consent for the creation of the new society, as had the privy councillor, who wished the new society good luck in its work.²² The Ministry for Warfare even sent the medic from the General Staff to join the creation committee and to assist in the process of establishing the new society.

On 20 January 1864, Dr Hahn informed Dunant that the new society, the Relief Committee for the Wounded Soldiers (Hilfskomitee für die verwundeten Soldaten), had been established. Hahn himself held the chair.²³ He expressed his hope that in the near future individual departments within the new society would be created. In March 1864 the statutes of the new committee were formally reviewed and published, together with the names of all members of the governing board, which included, besides Dr Hahn, eight men and twelve women. The Relief Committee for the Wounded Soldiers enjoyed the protection of King Wilhelm I from its creation.

Between 1864 and 1866, eight further societies were created locally in Oldenburg, Prussia, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Hamburg, Hesse-Darmstadt, Saxony, Baden, and Bavaria.²⁴ Delegates from the societies of the southern German states took the initiative to explore ways to agree on a common point of view and to coordinate the activities of societies within the German Confederation. Following this initiative, the National Societies within the German Confederation allied on 20 April 1869 and formed the Central Committee of the German Associations for the Care of Wounded and Sick Warriors in the Field (*Zentralkomitee der Deutschen Vereine zur Pflege im Felde verwundeter und erkrankter Krieger*), with its office in Berlin.²⁵ However, in times of peace this central committee had only very limited and mainly coordinating powers, as the National Societies were keen to preserve their independence.²⁶ From the very start, the German Red Cross was thus an organisation based on the association of local branches and practiced auxiliary.²⁷

20 A. Quellmalz, above note 3, p. 197; W. Gruber, 'Baden-Württemberg', above note 3, p. 113.

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*

24 For further societies formed between 1863 and 1877, see W. Gruber, *125 Jahre Rotes Kreuz*, above note 3, p. 13.

25 A. Quellmalz, above note 3, p. 203.

26 *Ibid.*

27 This concept of auxiliary – which is still of paramount importance today – is the specific and distinctive partnership between the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their respective states. It balances the responsibilities of a National Society within a state against the principle of independence according to which every component of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement works. The concept entails mutual responsibilities and benefits and is based on international and national laws, in which the state and the National Society agree on the areas in which the latter substitutes for public humanitarian services. See ICRC, '31st International Conference 2011: Resolution 4 – Furthering the auxiliary role', Resolution, 1 December 2011, available at: www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/resolution/31-international-conference-resolution-4-2011.htm. It is worth noting that, as the German Confederation could not agree on one delegate to represent all the states at the International Conference in Geneva in 1864, Dr Hahn was authorised to participate in the Conference for the State of Württemberg. In his letter

When the Prussian–German War loomed in May 1866, Dr Hahn again emphatically urged the new King Karl I²⁸ to sign and ratify the Geneva Convention. Württemberg eventually joined the Convention on 2 June 1866. Other German states followed.²⁹

The Prussian–German War was the first challenge for the Württembergische Sanitätsverein to prove its worth.³⁰ With the assistance of the Central Committee, the personnel cared for the wounded and sick without distinction as to their nationality. Queen Olga³¹ took the overall lead within both institutions.³² Calls for donations were placed all over the country, with detailed descriptions of the specific necessities. These were of great success. A women’s committee, established on the request of Queen Olga, joined the Central Committee and helped it to train medical personnel. Across the country, local branches emerged to assist the work of the Württembergische Sanitätsverein.

Having proven its value in times of war, the Württembergische Sanitätsverein received letters of gratitude from King Karl I himself as well as from the Württemberg Ministry for Warfare, the Prussian Central Committee and several other states.³³

of 22 July 1864 to the ICRC in which he announced this fact, he also proposed the idea that it might be helpful if delegates of all newly created societies would confederate.

28 A. Quellmalz, above note 3, p. 200.

29 See above note 14. Hesse joined on 22 June 1866, Bavaria on 30 June 1866. Saxony was only able to join after the war on 25 October 1866, as it was already under occupation by Prussia in June. Under the influence of King Karl I, Austria joined on 21 July 1866.

30 See also the German–Danish war, February–October 1864.

31 Crown Princess Olga was married to King Karl I and thus became Queen in 1864.

32 A. Quellmalz, above note 3, p. 200.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 201.