

## The legacy of Count Douglas

The spirit of Count Robert Douglas, a war hero from the Thirty Years' War, will be summoned to the civil chamber of the Stade District Court on Friday this week. The aim is to determine whether the State of Lower Saxony is obliged to adhere to a commitment that Count Douglas made to his sovereign, Queen Christine of Sweden, around 300 years ago.



It is the secularization contract with which "Your Royal Majesty of Sweden, Our Most Gracious Queen and Miss Christine Dero Hochbestalten General-Lieutenandt, the well-bored Mr. Robert Dugassen, in remark of his high merits and with the brave deeds demonstrated in the warfare in Teutschlandt with the Closter Zeven most gracious beneficiet ... "Back then Zeven was Swedish.

The contract is dated January 28, 1650. Count Douglas commits himself in gratitude for the fact that the Queen gave it to the secularized Zeven monastery (which was removed from the property of the church), church and school from Zeven to maintain the acquired monastery property "in construction and improvement".

The former monastery of Zeven has long since become a town of 6526 inhabitants (it is located in the Bremervörde district), and Count Douglas'

bones have been decayed for a long time. But the old document has retained practical economic importance throughout time.

If, in 1931, the Reichsgericht in Leipzig could not avoid compelling the State of Prussia to "build and improve" the Zevener church and school, the Zevener believe that the State of Lower Saxony would eventually, if not before the Stadergericht, so crawl to crosses in front of the Federal Court of Justice in Karlsruhe and have to recognize the old document from 1650 as binding on itself.

The feudal lord Graf Douglas himself never had to take care of the "construction and improvement" of the Zeven school. Because 26 years after his mortgage, 1676, after the Battle of Fehrbellin, Christoph Bernhard von Galen, Prince-Bishop of Münster \*), who had allied himself with the Great Elector, and the Swedish Dragoons chased him to the devil.

In the peace of St. Germain (1679) the duchies of Bremen and Verden and with them Zeven became Swedish again until 1715, when the Swedes were followed by the Danes in their rule. In the same year, however, the Danes sold their new property for 6 tons of gold (877,000 thalers) to King George I of England-Hanover, who later, in 1719, in the Peace of Stockholm, sold another 1 million and 90,000 thalers the Swedes had to pay to keep the country.

During this time, there were already the first difficulties with the "construction and improvement" of the Zeven school, namely with the Royal Hanoverian Domain Chamber. In the history of the monastery in Zeven it is said that she did minor repairs to the church, rectory and school house at her own expense



Acceptance of new commitments and larger expenses, but have brought processes to light.

From 1757, after the Hanoverians allied with Frederick the Great had been defeated by the French at the Battle of Hastenbeck, the French and Prussians took care of the construction and improvement of the Zeven school, depending on who the duchies fell to. From 1813 to 1866 it was the turn of the Hanoverians.

The Zeven school problem had become urgent in that the number of 30 children from the time of Count Douglas had grown to 170 under the King of Hanover. For this very reason, however, the royal consistory in Stade, as the legal successor to Count Douglas, refused to provide a second school room, since it felt that the Zeven school was only obliged to the extent that it existed at the time of Count Douglas in terms of space and the number of children.

However, through two judgments, one from the judicial office in Stade on September 20, 1845 and one at the Higher Appellate Court in Celle on February 16, 1846, the Hanoverian Treasury was subsequently sentenced to "ensure that the school meets the needs of the now existing school community according to, so if necessary also expanded ". In this way, Zeven received a new school house with two classrooms on July 17, 1848, at the state's expense.

But the two classrooms soon turned out to be too small. As a result, a third classroom had to be added in 1863. This opportunity was used by the Zevener, relying on Count Douglas to ask the Treasury to pay the corresponding number of teachers.

But they were out of luck. The Treasury was condemned by the large Senate of the Royal High Court in Verden in accordance with the Zeven application. But the higher appellate court in Celle rejected the judgment. The decision was made: the tax authorities are not responsible for the salaries of the teachers and for the church in Zeven, but they do have to bear all the building costs for the church, school and parish in Zeven.

This inheritance was taken over by the Land of Prussia after the Kingdom of Hanover became Prussian in 1867 (until 1945). The fourth and fifth school classes in Zeven were due immediately. As before the Hanoverian, the Prussian Treasury now resisted the necessary school building. "But, as the chronicle of the Zeven monastery says," he could not escape the obligations arising from the judgment of the Higher Appellate Court in Celle on February 16, 1846, and had to consider building a new school. "

In 1899, the new school building with five rooms was actually inaugurated. In 1910, however, two new rooms had to be added in order to accommodate the youngsters from Zeven. The Prussian Treasury paid 11,000 marks for the cultivation. The city of Zeven only provided manual and tensioning services. In a process that lasted through the First World War, the tax authorities were even condemned to install central heating in the church in Zeven and to pay the heating costs, an achievement that Count Douglas certainly had not thought of when he took on the consequent obligation in 1630.

From the 30 students at the time of Count Douglas and the 500 students at the time of the Imperial court decision of 1931 has meanwhile 1074 school children from Zeven who are now waiting for the tax authorities to give them a new school, as before.

The spokesman for Zeven's claims to the state of Lower Saxony is Zeven's city director Wilhelm Weiss, 52. He is convinced: "The state has to betool."

Weiss presents the Lower Saxony tax authorities with the alternative, either

\* To take over 3250 marks, which Zeven has to deduct from annual interest of a capital raised of 65,000 marks for a makeshift solution to the school question. In this case, the Zeven claims from Count Douglas's time against the respective authorities are to continue,

\* or the Zevenern a new, 14 class school (costs: between 500 000 and

700,000 marks) for which the legacy of Count Douglas is to be finally liquidated.

This generous proposal, unheard of in the 300-year history of the Zeven school, may be connected with the fact that - as the late Zeven superintendent Georg Meyer complains in his Zeven history of the monastery - "the tax authorities are again trying to prove the inadequacy, even the complete consumption of the Zeven monastery goods, and then also the obligation to maintain the church, parish and school in Zeven under construction and improvement, to be removed. If this proof were ever successful, however, the tax authorities would be entitled to resign from their patronage. "

Zeven's city director Weiss is confident that this proof will not be able to succeed after 300 years.

