

Social Stratification in Rural Society in Oldenburg during the 18th and 19th Centuries

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Oldenburg in northwestern Germany was composed of two different types of agricultural areas. One type was the inland heathland (Geest), where corn husbandry was dominant on the sandy soils. The other type was the coastal marshland (Marsch), where dairy farming was developed on the fertile grasslands protected by banks from North Sea floods.

In the sandy heathland, most peasants were subsistence farmers. They were not involved in the market economy, as the land market was undeveloped in this area. The agricultural labourers had no other possibility but to reclaim barren moorland by themselves. They lived otherwise in a peasant's farm as tenant-workers called "Heuerling" in northwestern Germany. The "Heuerling" formed a typical lower class in rural society in the heathland area.

In the marshland, on the other hand, many farmers could gain profits by selling dairy products, such as milk, butter, and cheese, in city markets. The land market was also available for the rural population to expand or to establish their farms. Some other farmers, however, suffered from great losses in trade and experienced a decline in their social status. In this way, in rural society in the marshland area, farmers were often differentiated into these two poles.