



## **History of Buenting Tea Trading Company, the oldest existing private tea trading company in Ostfriesland**

J. Buenting Beteiligungs AG is a joint-stock trading company with its headquarters in Leer (Ostfriesland) in northwestern Germany. Buenting is one of the largest companies in Ostfriesland, both in terms of turnover (ca. €1.6 Billion = €1.95 Milliard annually) and number of employees (ca. 13,000 of whom ca. 650 are apprentices). It is also one of the most important training companies in the region. Bünting is best known for its “original Ostfriesen tea” brand.

Heavily involved in wholesale and retail sales with 7 distribution companies which include Combi, familia Northwest (familia Verbrauchermarkt Einkaufsstätte GmbH & Co. KG), Markant Nordwest and the Bünting eCommerce with the online shop mytime.de, the most popular online supermarket nationwide, which markets, sells and delivers foodstuff nationwide. Its sales activities are concentrated in Northwest Germany with the core regions lying between the North Sea coast in the north and the Muensterland (the area around Muenster) in the south. They extend from the Dutch border in the west to Ost Westphalia-Lippe including the metropolitan region of Hannover-Braunschweig-Göttingen-Wolfsburg in the east.

Through the eyes of the public the name Buenting is linked above all with the tea house and the Ostfriesen tea.

The history of tea began about 5,000 years ago in China. Today, tea is the second most consumed drink in the world after water. The history of Buenting tea began only a good 200 years ago, in 1806 in the Ostfriesland trading town of Leer. Today it is the oldest private tea company Ostfrieslands.

Ostfriesland is in the northwest coastal region of Germany in Niedersachsen, bordering onto the Netherlands. It is a flat countryside (predominantly agriculture) with special manners, customs, culture and their own language officially recognized by UNESCO.

Tea still plays an important role for many people in northern Germany. We Frisians looked to the Netherlands or England for cultural traditions rather than to our own countrymen. In 1610 the first tea was brought to Europe by ships of the Dutch East-India Company and hence also to Leer. Today, according to the German Tea Association, if East Frisia were a country its annual per capita consumption of 300 liters would be the highest in the world, ahead of Kuwait's 290 liters, Ireland's 257 and Turkey's 225. One reason is the east-frisian water. It is exceptionally soft and sweet which has an amazing effect on the taste of tea.

When coffee took off in Germany and other parts of Europe in the 19th century, we East Frisians kept to our tea because it was cheaper. Tea leaves can be used over and over again and they do not require grinders and filters. When guests came, East Frisians showed their hospitality by throwing more leaves in the pot and in time a heavy brew became the standard. This is one reason why tea from Assam is so important for us.

Over the last 215 years Buenting has had four strong pillars: Coffee, Tobacco, Tea and Whole / Retail trading operations.

**Coffee** was always a typical product of the colonial goods trading company. Coffee was originally traded as a raw material, limiting its storability and palatability. For a long time it was considered a luxury good not meeting the Ostfriesen taste. Although tea was comparatively more expensive than coffee it had the advantage that it could be re-brewed a number of times. Not possessing a coffee roasting machine initially Buenting had to have its coffee roasted externally by the Heinrich Meyer Company. Dietrich Klopp (a member of the bondowner family) was greatly responsible for expanding the coffee business installing an in-house coffee roasting machine in 1931 / 32, thus being able to offer high quality coffee under a Buenting Brand name.

From 1963 onwards the company offered high quality coffee under the brand name "Kofrosta". In 1970 the average turnover was 5 Million cups of Buenting coffee per month. Using a special pressured air process at -75°C after roasting impurities could be removed from the coffee beans making it extremely palatable and digestible. The process was patented and Buenting was able to use it under license in Germany.

With the introduction of vacuum packing Buenting was no longer able to compete with the major coffee roasters. The production and trade with coffee was stopped in 2002.

**Tobacco** could have become the image building product for Buenting. As an important trading product tobacco took up a lot of space in the house in Brunnenstrasse and later in the packing rooms behind the house. The tobacco was bought in from both the inland and foreign tobacco exchanges. The raw material was delivered in drums to Leer Harbor. The trading companies parched, dried, cleaned, cut, mixed and immediately packed the tobacco in packages. Although the manufacturing process was not particularly clean Buenting endeavored to use the most modern technics. The tobacco packages were then shipped and sold throughout Germany and made the Buenting name well known far beyond the borders of Ostfriesland. In 1931 Buenting sold 250,000 Kilogram Tobacco. "Amsterdamer" became the brand name of many Buenting tobacco products.

But Tobacco never became the "Star" of the company. Onno Klopp, as the Buenting Tobacco man, attempted to expand the business. Small tobacco companies were acquired in Ostfriesland and Oldenburg. In house cigarette production was started up. However when the tax privilege for imported tobacco was eliminated at the end of the 1970s Buenting was no longer able to process and market tobacco profitably. Initially a company in Emsland produced for Buenting under license before the business was finally stopped in 1982.

Tea whose career at Buenting started somewhat faint-heartedly was not put on the product sales list until 1827. From the beginning though tea was always traded and sold to retailers in boxes. They blended and packed the tea themselves and sold it as their own specialty. In 1890 the company was still only known as the "Buenting Handelsfirma." In 1908 the company was renamed "Buenting Kolonialwaren-Handlung en gros und Tabak-Fabrik." It was only in 1914 that tea was finally put in the company name "Buenting Tee- und Kolonialwarenhandlung en gros und Tabakfabrik."

It was Carl Klopp (1885 - 1963) who put more focus at Buenting on tea. To his honor one of the top products in the present tea range carried his initials, "C.K.Privat". Carl had initially learned traditionally from 1903 to 1906 in the company and then went to London, which was not unusual for his family at the time. A novelty, however, was that he worked there for seven years in a renowned tea company. He

acquired all the knowledge he could gain about tea, and brought this invaluable capital of tea knowledge to Leer, when he joined the company in 1918. He introduced the mechanical blending and packaging of tea. In 1936, he created the "Grünpack" ("Green Pack") and thus "created" a quality tea brand that is still the flagship of Buenting Tee. However he turned down the proposal to sell tea in cup portions in little tea bags with the remark "I sell tea and not paper", thus allowing a competitor to expand into this new segment first.

But it was the Teehandelshaus that formed the image of the company throughout Germany. 6% of all German tea imports go to Ostfriesland. The Ostfriesans are not only the league leaders when it comes to Germany's tea drinkers. With a consumption averaging over 300 litres per-head every year, more than in England, they are the clear world champions. And their leading position has not been challenged for decades. This derives from the geographical nearness and the historical close trading links of Ostfriesland to the Netherlands and the fact that it was the Dutch who first introduced tea into Europe in the 17th Century. After the Ostfriesans had been introduced to tea through their Dutch neighbors, it was the British who supplied them with tea especially in the 19th century. Until the second half of the 19th century Ostfriesans drank mainly green tea from China. With the cultivation of tea in India by the British black tea was made available. Hereby, the British replaced the Chinese green teas in Ostfriesland, which became a land of black tea drinkers.

In addition to the Ostfriesan Tea Blend, the proper preparation also belongs to the true Ostfriesan tea ceremony. The tea is not stirred, but drunk in three layers of cream ("Wulkje"), tea and Candysugar ("Kluntje"). If the teaspoon is placed in the cup, the host knows that no further tea is desired

In 1903 Buenting closed its own retail sales organization and shops and started to sell only through distributors, retailers and partners, focusing solely on the wholesale business. However in the 1960s the company saw the danger coming from the rapidly growing self-service supermarkets and large cooperatives plus the crisis of the traditional retail shop in Ostfriesland losing more and more business. One-stop shopping, shopping as a pleasure and enjoyment on a green-field site, was what German customers were now asking for. The strategic decision was taken to reenter the retail market and in 1967 the first Buenting self-service supermarkets were opened. Parallel to founding the familia company, Buenting opened under the name "Krone" a self-service supermarket in Ammerlaender Heerstrasse with a sales area of 4,000 qm., enormous at the time. In 1967 Buenting already had five smaller self-service shops each with a sales area of 1,000 qm. under the name A&O Markets. From now on there was no turning back. Through organic growth and strategic acquisitions the retail business continued to expand rapidly to this day becoming the major part of Buenting's business and turnover today.

#### **Chronicle:**

1806

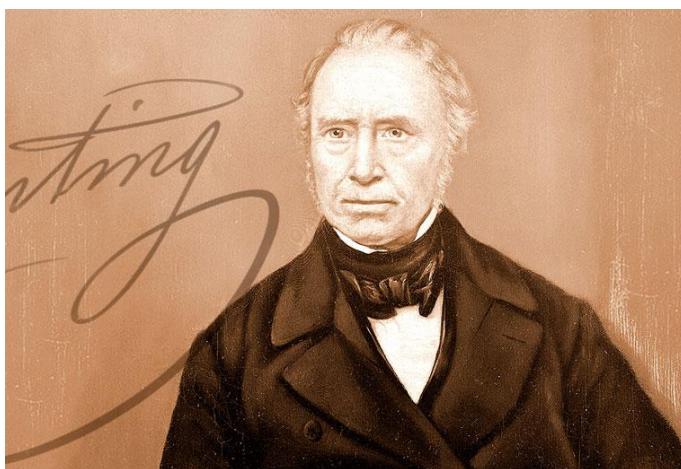
Johnann Buenting, the founder of the company, was born 1782 into a farming family in Ammerland bei Edewecht, in the Duchy of Oldenburg. Although poor, the family could trace their origins back into the 14th Century and in the 18th Century were still minor aristocrats with their own coat of arms. As the second born son Johann had no rights to inherit any of the family land. Normally he would have been destined to become a priest or join the army. But Johann was not prepared to accept this destiny. He had attended the local Latin school (Gymnasium) but without completing the final examinations, which prevented him from studying at university. He was an extremely courageous man and had a dream which he wanted to fulfill. He dreamt of owning his own trading business. He knew exactly: The world

only belongs to the brave – those prepared to take calculated risk. That's how it was then, that's how it is today and it will be like that for the next 200 years. His motto "Risk and Win" is more relevant than ever.



Photo of Johann Buentings birth place, a farm near Oldenburg.

To fulfill his dream he took a number of risks all at once. At the age of 24 he resigned his job as clerk in the local court at Bad Zwischenahn and took the courageous step of taking all his savings and moved from the Duchy of Oldenburg to Leer, a day's journey away, in Ostfriesland, which at the time was part of Prussia. He started his career as a business man in Leer as a clerk in the Leer Wine Trading Company of Christian Boerner.



Johann Buenting - Portrait

Leer in 1800 was a trading port with a population of 5,000. Freight ships from Amsterdam or Bremer came into harbor where the goods were weighed, taxed and auctioned off.

1st May 1806

On 1st May 1806 Johann Buenting leased a "Kruideniers trade" – a shop for trading with colonial goods - from Eerke S. Meyer - who had run the business profitably for 36 years - in "Zwischen beiden Brunnen" (today "Brunnenstrasse") on the outskirts of Leer and started trading in colonial goods, especially tea, tobacco and coffee. The old house of Buenting Teas is still standing in Brunnenstraße 37 in Leer. Thus he

achieved his dream of owning his own trading business - and laid the foundation for the oldest private tea trading company in Ostfriesland.



Photo – The old house still stands at Brunnenstraße 37 in Leer where Johann Buenting founded his grocery store in 1806.

As always, on May 3, 1806, the local merchants walked to the Leer harbor to bid for freshly arrived goods – Tea, Whale Oil, Tobacco and Spanish Cognac were on offer. To get to the harbor auction rooms Johann had to pass down Pfefferstrasse (today Rathausstrasse) passed the offices of the well-established trading companies and the store rooms of the dock owners. Somewhat excited a young man, who no one in Leer knew yet, made his first bids. Johann had taken the first steps on the long way to becoming an important trading company.



Ships arriving in Leer Port loaded with Tea, Whale Oil, Tobacco and Spanish Cognac

The colonial shop of those days cannot be compared with a modern retail store. Most of the products were stored on boxes or sacks in small rooms and packed for sale by the store keeper in paper bags or cans. Little cash was in circulation. Most goods were bought on credit, which were paid for twice a year.

On 7th January 1807 Johann was engaged to Eta Klopp, the daughter of a highly honored citizen of Leer, Wilko Klopp. They married 20th August the same year and had 11 children.

These were difficult times for business. In 1806, after Prussia's defeat at the battle of Jena against Napoleon, Ostfriesland was annexed by Netherlands and came under French ruling. France imposed the Continental Blockade, in an attempt to stop the delivery of all English goods to continental European. During this difficult period Johann Buenting must have been involved in smuggling and been partner in a

ship involved in breaking the blockade. This brought him into conflict with the French authorities and in 1811 he was brought to Groningen and later to France (1813) where he was imprisoned. Whilst he was in prison his wife Eta Klopp ran the business. She did this so successfully that on Johann's return enough money had earned to buy in cash for 8,000 Dutch gulden the house in Brunnenstrasse 37 with shop and garden from the Auctioneer Schelten in Leer on 23rd June 1813. With the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig in 1813 the political situation eased.

#### 1st January 1816

In 1815 the Buenting Company was valued at 32,000 Dutch Gulden. In addition shares were held in the trading ships. Buenting also held shares in the local Herring Fishing Company and the Leer Assekuranz Insurance Company.

In order to reorganize his company Johann Bünting announced that he would manage the company together with his brother-in-law Weert Klopp. On 1st January 1816 the new company to be known as "J. Bünting & Co. " was founded. Weert Klopp, the offspring of a family that has already been successfully established in Leer, took on responsibility. Johann Buenting held one sixth of the shares in the company, Weert Klopp the rest, opening a new chapter in the history of the company.

Weert Klopp died young at the age of 42 on the 15th May 1833. His widow Clara Elizabeth Henriette Klopp inherited his shares of the company. This responsibility she took on together with bringing up 12 children. She died in 1885 at the age of 90.

#### 1827

Tea put on the Buenting product sales list.

#### 1853

Johann Buenting died in 1853 at the age of 71 years. His wife Eta died in 1868. When Johann died, of the 41 ships with Leer ship-owners, he had a share in 7. The company had trade contacts in Groningen, Amsterdam, Riga, Hamburg and Bremen. However as a result of the loss of one of its ships Buenting sold all his shipping interests.

In 1853 Johann's son Weert Hermann Buenting took over the company management, but from 1872 onwards he withdrew from the daily running of the business as did the last Buenting son Hermann. The Klopp family took over the complete control and management of the "J. Buenting & Comp. " until it was turned into a joint-stock company in 1989.

The middle of the nineteenth century was a period of major change encouraging trade expansion. The industrial revolution brought iron casting companies, steam ships and railways to Leer. Borders, border controls and the resulting import and export duties, a continuous hindrance to trade, started to fall. In 1851 the Kingdom of Hannover, to which Ostfriesland now belonged, joined the Greater German Customs Union, founded in 1834, eliminating the financial burden of border import / export duties. In 1867, when the King of Hannover was taken over by Prussia, Ostfriesland became a member of the North German Union, the forerunner of the 1871 reunified German Empire. Weights and measures and currency could now be standardized. The company production facilities expanded north- and eastwards. Railways connections into the production facilities and the start of major road network allowed Buenting to become independent of shipping for product purchasing and sales.

1876

In 1876, after the death of Wilhelm Klopp (the son of Weert and Henriette Klopp) his two sons Carl Johann and Johann Dietrich together with his nephew Nicolaus Weert took charge of the company.

1890

In 1890 the company carries the name "Buenting Handelsfirma."

1903

Buenting closed its own retail sales organization and shops and started to focus on wholesale selling through distributors, retailers and partners.

1908

In 1908 William Klopp II became a partner in the company. But hardly had he started he was called up for military service together with his brother Carl.

In 1908 the company was renamed "Buenting Kolonialwaren-Handlung en gros und Tabak-Fabrik."

1910

Bünting tea started with the creation of its first "House Blends" and sold them through its retailers.

1914

In 1914 tea was finally mentioned in the company name "Buenting Tee- und Kolonialwarenhandlung en gros und Tabakfabrik."

Paula Klopp, the widow of the previous owner Nikolaus Weert Klopp managed the company during the First World War. Whilst until then wheelbarrows and plan wagons from external companies were used to transport goods, horse-drawn wagons now started to be used within a radius of 35 kilometers. When Wilhelm returned from military service he expanded the fleet.



Photo - horse-drawn wagons now started to be used within a radius of 35 kilometers

1920

The demand for tea grew rapidly and Bünting succeeded in mixing tea mechanically for the first time.



1922

During the hyperinflation period of 1922 for safety reasons the daily takings were taken by the Buenting employees in washing baskets and stored overnight in the bedroom of the senior manager.

1931

Resulting from the World Economic Crisis in 1929 the German Prime Minister Bruenning decided to increase the tobacco tax from the 1st January 1931 to reduce the government deficit. This resulted in a run on tobacco in November and December 1930. Buenting workers had to work day and night to fulfill all the tobacco orders on time. During these two months the tobacco sales turnover corresponded to six months of sales in a normal year.



Photo - Tobacco Factory 1905 in Harderwykensteg, Leer

Until 1931 Tea and Tobacco were the two house brands of the company. In 1931 Dietrich Klopp II established coffee as the third house brand. Turnover increased continuously and in 1932 the first coffee roasting machine was installed.



Photo - Buenting Coffee – Advertising Poster 1950s

1932

By 1932 business had stabilized again. Buenting had ca. 13,000 customers throughout the whole country. Daily some 700 packets mainly tobacco and tea were delivered by post to Oberschlesien, East Prussia, Bavaria, Saarland and Lausitz.

1935

For over 85 years, since 1935, Buenting tea has been sold in the green-gold bag and is considered the epitome of real Ostfriesen tea. Traditionally, it is drunk with candy and unwhipped cream.

Since 1910 until 1935 the exquisite house mixes that Bünting Tee had been manufacturing were mainly sold as "loose bulk tea" to the trade in Germany. In the 1930s the tea specialist Carl Klopp developed the idea of marketing tea packaged in bags making brand marketing possible. Someone also had the idea to simply fill the tea mixes in bags of different colors in order to differentiate between the different mixes. So there was a mixture for the red bag, one for the blue and another for the green bag. Bag color and "pack" - synonymous with several units - gave the respective product name: Gelbpack (Yellow Pack), Blaupack (Blue pack), Gruenpack (Green pack), Goldpack (Gold Pack).

In 1935 Carl Klopp initiated the conversion of sales from loose tea to packaged goods marketing for the first time branded teas. In addition to Blue pack (Blaupack), Red pack (Rotpack) and Gold pack (Goldpack) Carl and Wilhelm Klopp introduced the brand "Bünting Green pack - real Ostfriesen tea", which is still one of the favorite teas of the Ostfriesen.



Photo – Green Pack – Gruenpack Tea

1938

In 1938 a new three story tea building was built for automatic tea packaging.

1939 – 1945

During the World War II Buenting was considered a war relevant company being a supplier of tea to the army and a distributor of tea rations to the Weser-Ems area. Despite this only a small number of employees were relieved of military service. Of the 157 employees in 1939 20 were killed in action during the war.

While the name Grünpack has been retained over all decades, there have been many changes in blending and manufacturing. Especially in times of war, tea was in short supply and the varieties available had to be used. The tea was also influenced by the English, who were stationed as occupying forces in Ostfriesland after World War II. They introduced the Ostfriesen to the taste of the "broken tea". The crushed tea leaves were much more productive. The Ostfriesen, known as the thrifty, took over the tradition.

After World War II it seemed that time had stood still in Ostfriesland. The J. Buenting & Co. had principally the same legal structure that it had had since 1816, with a patriarch organization and 250 employees. There is still the same tobacco manufacturing with the processing of raw tobacco to pipe tobacco with sales and marketing. There is tea import with blending, sales and marketing, coffee trading, initially with raw coffee and since 1938 with its own coffee roasting, plus whole sale trade with foodstuff of all types. The products had to be packed and prepared for transport and delivery. Thousands of customers, all retail sellers, had to be supplied with product delivered via lorry, ship, car or horse-drawn wagons. The company had branch offices in Emden (1924), Oldenburg (1933), Esens (1949) and Wilhelmshafen (1949).

With the end of the war no tea was available for Buenting who had to focus on selling alternative replacement products. Young women would come up from the Ruhr area with tea they had hoarded from their rations during the war to exchange for meat and potatoes. With the currency reform of 1948, the Marshall plan to rebuild war damaged Germany and the elimination of rationing in 1950 business started to move forward again.

1969

In 1969 Bünting tea produced and sold its first tea bags. The practical tea bags for individual cup portions became increasingly popular.



Photo – Buenting Tea Bags

1982

In 1982 tobacco production was stopped and the brand removed from the sales list.

1986 – 87

By 1986 – 87 the Buenting Tea Trading Company had grown considerably and bought further office and production facilities in Hafenstraße in Leer.



Photo – Aerial view of the Old Town (Altstadt) of Leer

1989

In 1989 Buenting became a joint-stock company.

1997

In 1997 for the first time a modern quality management system was introduced. Bünting tea was certified according to DIN ISO 9001.

1999

In 1999 Bünting Tee was the first company to introduce rooibos tea to the food retail sector. It can now be found in many supermarkets in northern Germany and enjoys great popularity.



Photo – Buenting Rooibos Tea

2002

In 2002 the sales and marketing of coffee was stopped.

2007

In 2007 the Buenting Tea Trading Company developed its own range of organic / bio teas of 9 different grades. With the best ingredients from certified biological / organic cultivation - in traditional first-class Bünting tea quality.



Photo – Buenting Biotea Peppermint

2011

In 2011 the Buenting Tea Trading Company moved from Hafenstraße to the new, more modern production facility in Nortmoor near Leer. At the same time Bünting Tee eliminated the use of the metal clip for the tea bag and converted its machines to knotting the tea bags. In addition, "Bünting Green pack - genuine Ostfriesentee" was voted "Culinary Ambassador 2011" by the Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen) Marketing Agency.

2013

In 2013 "Bünting Green pack - real Ostfriesentee" received the "Brand of the Century" award.



Photo - "Bünting Green pack - real Ostfriesentee" and the "Brand of the Century" award.

2018

In 2018 the loose bio / organic tea product line was introduced onto the market.

Bünting Tee was herewith the first brand manufacturer, which distributed loosely packaged tea in bio / organic quality nationally to the food retail trade.



Photo – Buenting loose bio tea

2019

The Buenting Group with ca. 13,000 (of whom ca. 650 are apprentices) is one of the largest employers and training companies for apprentices in the North West of Germany with a clear social responsibility.

Since re-entering the retail market in 1967 The Buenting Group has expanded significantly through organic growth and acquisitions the wholesale and retail business using various distribution channels which include:

familia Northwest (familia Verbrauchermarkt Einkaufsstätte GmbH & Co. KG) with 20 Self-service Stores in Northwest Germany, each with a sales area between 4,000 and 10,000 m<sup>2</sup>, offering a full range of products, up to 80,000 articles, with over-regional significance. Usually situated in the center of a shopping mall with a shop-in-shop system, cafés and restaurants.

Combi with 180 Self-service stores each with a sales area between 1,000 and 3,000 m<sup>2</sup>, offering up to 25,000 articles

Markant Nordwest – A partnership-based cooperation with over 200 independent retailers each with a sales area of ca. 1,500 m<sup>2</sup>. Designed as neighborhood markets located particularly near to the customers, they provide consumers with everyday products.

Buenting eCommerce with the online shop mytime.de, the most popular online supermarket nationwide, which markets, sells and delivers foodstuff nationwide.

Übersetzt im Sepember 2019 von Brian James Rothwell für die London Tea Association, ergänzt von Henning Priet.