



Dollhopf

600 Years in the Baking

Dollhopf Women

This is the first essay in a series addressing the life and times of our Dollhopf grandmothers.

Introduction



Mistelbach. *14 known generations – over 400 years – of our Dollhopf grandmothers lived within the frame of this photograph. In the center is St. Bartholomew Church, which Margrave George the Pious (“Margrave” is a royal title for the head of a principality, like king, earl, duke, etc.) converted to Protestantism around 1528 to 1534. Before then, when it was Catholic, it was known as St. Martin Church. Dollhopf house #19 is the large house in the lower right-hand corner (sunlight on the windows). Johann Dollhopf (our 4th great-grandfather) assumed ownership of the house in 1784. Prior to that time our family of Dollhopfs lived in the valley beyond the church. The Mistel stream flows through this valley. Mistelbach is next to the city of Bayreuth in Oberfranken (“Upper Franconia”), an administrative region of northern Bavaria bordering the Czech Republic. The 24 villages in the immediate area around Mistelbach are known collectively as the “Hummelgau” – an agricultural region with distinct cultural traditions.*

Who were our Dollhopf grandmothers?

I wish I knew. I have voluminous data on our grandfathers – going back 17 generations – but for the wives, not as much.

I know that our 15th great-grandfather Hans Tolhopf¹ was likely born between the years 1390 and 1410, and died sometime after the year 1454; that he probably was a miller, that he lived in Bayreuth at Maximilianstrasse 75 (“Maximilian Street”), that he acquired 3½ acres of land in Mistelbach in the early 1430s, that he had at least three

¹ Dollhopf was variously spelled with a “T” until the 1800s.

children – Hans, who died unmarried at a relatively young age, Gerhaws, a daughter² who married a man named Ulrich Mulner, and Dietrich, our 14th great-grandfather, who acquired the village mill in Mistelbach in 1499.³

But I don't know the name of his wife. Nowhere to be found in church or civil (government) records.

In the Middle Ages European record keeping was largely, although not exclusively, androcentric. Women were often absent from early church and civil records because they did not have legal standing or economic status; they were considered, well, inferior. Of our seven Dollhopf grandmothers born prior to 1600, we don't know the maiden name of four of them, and we don't even know the first names of three.

In the centuries before churches were required to track baptisms, marriages, and funerals (before the mid 1500s), records, if they existed, were almost exclusively civil. It was essential for feudal lords to track information specifically about men to 1) grant fiefs⁴ (distribute land), 2) assess and levy taxes, 3) control the trades,⁵ and 4) mete out political power through appointments such as village administrators (similar to sheriffs or mayors), church wardens, and pastors – all the province of men.

Women did not appear in civil records unless there were civil disputes, inheritance or marriage agreements, or other criminal matters – and even then, they had to be represented by men.

Women were, and still are, subjugated for many complicated – and not so complicated – cultural reasons, reasons that I can't begin to fully explore in this series of essays. We take for granted that in the 21st century women can vote, own and inherit property, enter contracts, attend school or college,



Photo of an unknown Franconian peasant woman from the Fränkische Schweiz-Museum ("Franconian Switzerland Museum"), a cultural heritage museum in Tüchersfeld, 13 miles from Mistelbach. Mistelbach is part of the region known as Franken ("Franconia"). This photo is probably from the 1800s. She is in ceremonial attire, most likely for a baptism, marriage, or funeral. She appears to be holding a rosary, so she was probably from one of the Catholic villages, although many Protestants continued to practice Catholic traditions. Villages were either Catholic or Protestant – typically there was only one church in each village.

² The origin of the name, Gerhaws or *Gerhauß* in German, is obscure. It was a rare feminine name in Bavaria in the 14th and 15th centuries. Similar to the men's name Gerhard, the root word *Ger* could mean "tannery," or "spear." Why this is a girl's name is not known. <http://www.ellipsis.cx/~liana/names/german/kulmbach1495.html>

³ From inheritance court records filed by his children.

⁴ Fiefs, or land leases, were mostly masculine in Mistelbach, meaning that physical property – buildings and land – could only be inherited by men.

⁵ Nobility, or their administrators, controlled peasant occupations so that any one village did not have too many tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, etc.

work outside the home, or are allowed to defend themselves against domestic violence (much less prevent it). We often fail to realize that many of these basic human rights were shockingly achieved only in the last century.



From the same Fränkische Schweiz-Museum, a photo of a peasant woman in daily garb.

To wit, prior to the 1900s:

Women had no political standing; they could not vote. In 1776 the Founding Fathers declared that all men were created equal. All *men*. All women, however, could not vote until 1920 in the United States. Germany instituted universal suffrage after the Second Reich was dissolved in 1918.

Women had few legal rights. It wasn't until 1900 when all of the US states adopted a version of the *1848 Married Woman's Property Act*, which made it legal for a woman to enter into contracts on her own, receive an inheritance in her own right, and file a lawsuit. Some areas of Germany were a bit more progressive. In Mistelbach, for example, they practiced "partible" inheritance – while only the sons inherited property, the daughters received an *equal* monetary share of the estate.

Women did not have equal access to higher education. German universities did not admit women until 1909. Until the 20th century most universities in the US were all male, effectively barring women from higher education (although on the eve of WWII, only 3% of the entire adult population had a college degree, thus it was rare for anyone).

Women had no recourse against physical violence by their husbands. Shockingly, wife beating was not made illegal in all of the United States until 1920. Domestic violence remains a scourge worldwide.

Women were expected to take care of the house and children and were largely barred from the workplace. As near as I can determine, our grand aunt Flora Dollhopf, born in 1901, the youngest child of John Dollhopf, *was the first Dollhopf woman in 600 years to have a "job" outside the home.*⁶

Did any women have jobs in the Middle Ages?

⁶ The first woman, that is, in our direct line of descent. Still instructive, however. In the 1920s, when she was in her 20s, Flora took a job as a candy packer at the Clark Bar factory on Pittsburgh's North Side. Flora, who never married, lived with her mother Lizzie and brother Albert at 22 Iona Street on the North Side until the house was condemned and razed in 1954. If you grew up in Pittsburgh you remember the famous Clark Bar sign, which, even though the company long ago went bankrupt, has been preserved and still glows above the old Clark factory site behind the PNC Park baseball stadium. The Clark Bar was developed in 1917 by David Clark, an Irish immigrant, as a confection to be distributed to US troops in WW I. With its spun taffy peanut butter core covered in chocolate (similar to a Butterfinger), it was America's first "combination" candy – chocolate combined with a distinct filling. The factory on the North Side, where Flora worked, shipped over 1.5 million bars *daily* to US troops in WW II. She must have been busy. Most, if not all, of the women in the next generation, including Edward's children Ruth, Lois, and LaVerne, had jobs outside the home. According to the 1940 US Census, Ruth was working as a stenographer at the "Electric Co.," and Lois was a clerk at a church in West View. At the time LaVerne was 16 and still in school.

Of course. In larger towns and cities women – mostly upper and merchant class women – worked at trades and were even members of trade guilds, although they were mostly barred from guild meetings.⁷

But in the Middle Ages more than 90% of the population were peasant farmers, and peasant wives were tied to the house. They cared for the children, tended the house and animal stable (which, in Mistelbach and throughout the region, was *in* the house), gathered firewood, prepared food, and were also responsible, customarily in Mistelbach, for the daily cutting and gathering of green forage for cattle.⁸

They also worked the fields during intense periods of sowing and harvesting:

Labor was divided according to the workers' gender. Some activities were restricted to either men or women; other activities were preferred to be performed by one gender over the other: e.g. men ploughed, mowed, and threshed and women gleaned,⁹ cleared weeds, bound sheaves, made hay, and collected wood; and yet others were performed by both, such as harvesting.¹⁰

You might be asking, “What did the men do?” In addition to clearing, plowing, sowing, and harvesting, many also practiced trades to supplement their subsistence farming. Their small farms did not provide for any food surplus that could be sold. Such trades included miller, baker, tailor, shoemaker, stone mason, weaver, butcher, soldier, inn keeper, etc.



Peasant women from the Mistelbach region wearing ceremonial crowns of flowers. http://landschaften-in-deutschland.de/img/81/themen/81_B_106/_vorschaubilder/abb10-effeltrich-1933-cpa.jpg

⁷ A “guild” in the Middle Ages was an association of artisans or merchants who engaged in the same trade and oversaw its rules and regulations in a specific geographic area.

⁸ Mistelbach Chronicle.

⁹ “Glean” – to gather leftover grain and produce from the fields after the harvest.

¹⁰ Jane Whittle, rural historian, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_the_Middle_Ages

If our grandmothers practiced a trade or did have a “job” outside of the home, it was not recorded in the Mistelbach church books or court records. In fact, most women were described in the church books according to their husband’s or father’s trades, e.g., Müllerfrau (“miller’s wife”), Bäuerin (“farmer’s wife”), Steinmetz Tochter (“stone mason’s daughter”), etc. – examples from our Dollhopf family tree. In the Mistelbach records I have not come across one reference to a woman who “officially” practiced a trade, although nearly all of our grandmothers were accustomed to spinning fibers, typically out of flax or wool to produce thread and yarn, a common practice for peasant women.

Church and court records give us but a mere outline of women’s lives. Because fiefs were masculine (granted to men and passed from father to son), we know about the houses and farmland the men inherited and acquired. We know their trades and their relative financial situation because only men paid taxes, took out loans, and made contributions to the church. Only men could serve on the village “council” and occupy village or church offices. Only men fought in the armies. Pastors often made anecdotal notes in the church book margins about men, far less so, it at all, about the women.¹¹

Imagine if we were to write *your* life’s story – and the only information we had about you were your baptism, marriage, and funeral dates; your godparents (a diminishing practice today); a list of your children; your *husband’s* occupation; and maybe your cause of death. Would we really know you?

Of course not. We don’t know our grandmother’s personalities, dreams, aspirations, struggles, failures, religious beliefs, politics, finances, family dynamics... but most of all, their happiness.

Were they happy? To even begin to answer this question, we need to better understand their world view and the historical and cultural forces that shaped their lives.

The next 23 essays will highlight those influences and explore in detail the life and times of each of our 17 great grandmothers.¹²

Next in the series on Dollhopf women: World view, way of life, and witchcraft.

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¹¹ Notes such as “he was a pious and industrious man,” or “many people attended his funeral.”

¹² Hans Tolhopf is my 15th great grandfather. The youngest Dollhopf family members alive today are great grandchildren of Edward and Susan Born Dollhopf. Hans is their 17th grandfather. Counting these youngest family members, their parents, and their grandparents, there are 20 known generations.