



Dollhopf

600 Years in the Baking

Dollhopf Women

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

15th Great-Grandmother: NN NN (born abt 1400 – died aft 1455)

[Abbreviations: *NN* stands for “no name,” thus, in this instance her first name and maiden name are unknown. In the dates below *abt* = about; *aft* = after; *bef* = before; *c* = circa]

Birth: abt 1400 to 1415¹

Place of birth: Probably Bayreuth

Parents: Unknown

Marriage: Unknown

Husband: Hans Tolhopf (abt 1400/15-bef 1454, ~50)², probably a miller

Age at marriage: Unknown

Residence: Maximilianstrasse 75, Bayreuth

Number of known children: 3

Death: aft 1455

Cause of death: Unknown

Place of death: Bayreuth (all other grandmothers died in Mistelbach unless otherwise noted)

Our 15th great grandmother might have been a wealthy burgher. Beyond that we don't know much, including her name.

We don't know her name because the churches in Bayreuth and Mistelbach did not start keeping records until the mid 1500s. Anyone born before that time we must infer from court records, and women, because of their lack of legal standing, were often not mentioned by name.

But we do know that Hans had a wife (because he had children), and, given the approximate birth years of her children (which we know from court records), we know when she would have been fecund. We can then extrapolate that she was born between 1400 and 1415 in Bayreuth or Weidenberg.³ She married Hans Tolhopf, our earliest known and confirmed Dollhopf ancestor, around the year 1435 because we know that her first known child, Dietrich, was born between 1435 and 1445.

In the early 1400s Bayreuth was a modestly sized town of 1,500 inhabitants. From court inheritance records we know that she and husband Hans lived at Maximilianstrasse #75 (“Maximilian street #75”). Around the time they



Head of an Old Peasant Woman with White Cap, 1884 by Vincent Van Gogh. Not our great-grandmother, but a chiseled characterization of a peasant.

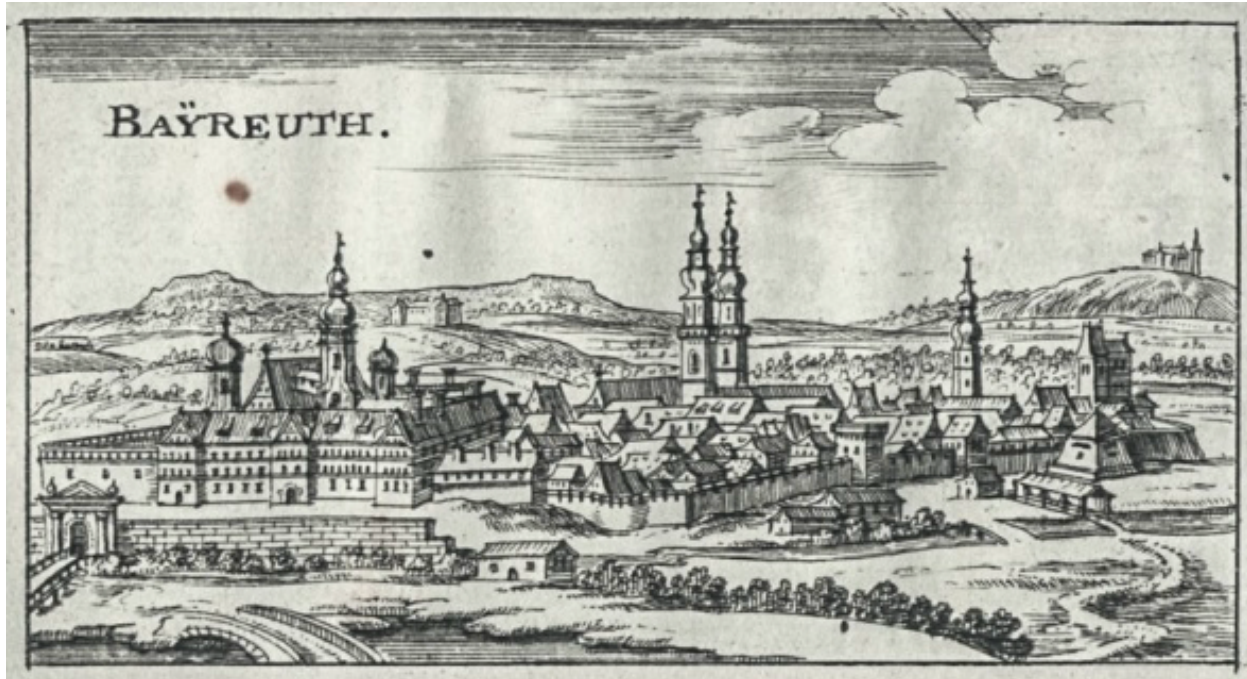
¹ The birth and death dates before 1555 are inferred from court records.

² In parentheses following the name are birth and death dates, followed by age at death.

³ Weidenberg is a village not far from Bayreuth, that was home to many Dollhopfs in the 14th and 15th centuries. Research continues, but Weidenberg might be the location where the surname Dollhopf (Tolhopf) was first used.

were married, Hans purchased 3½ acres in Mistelbach. Mistelbach shares a border with Bayreuth, and the property he purchased was about four miles from their house on Maximilianstrasse.⁴

This purchase was likely an “investment” because 3½ acres would not have been enough land to produce food for a family, and there is no evidence that they built a house on this land or moved there. From accounts of the period, the purchase of “investment” property in surrounding villages was common among the wealthier burgers of Bayreuth, perhaps a clue to Hans’ social status.



A view of Bayreuth in 1689 by Georg Christoph Eimmart: Vollständige Charta von Frankenland (“Complete Map of Franconia”); Nuremberg 1689. Hans and NN, our 15th great-grandparents, lived at Maximilianstrasse 75 at the “lower gate,” possibly the river gate illustrated at the lower left. Heintz Tollhopff, possibly our 16th great-grandfather, owned a mill at the upper city gate on the Red Main River. This etching of 1689, even though old, is 200 years after the description of the mills in court records. (www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de.)

Hans made this purchase in a tumultuous time – the region had been devastated because of the Hussite Wars, so there might have been abandoned land readily available.⁵ It is also known that the Margrave at the time offered considerable tax relief to the citizens because of the war devastation, so there was extra cash in the pockets of some peasants.

⁴ A reminder that peasants didn’t actually purchase land, they paid the Margrave a fee and in return were granted a *fief*, a lease on the land. How cool is it that we know the address of our 15th great grandparents? Such knowledge is very, very rare.

⁵ I wrote about the Hussite Wars (1420-1434) in *Blog #9: Pandemics and War*. Jan Huss was a Czech Protestant reformer who was martyred on July 6, 1415 (100 years before Luther). This Protestant uprising began in Prague, then located in Bohemia, today the Czech Republic; Bayreuth sits on the border. The Catholics, spearheaded by Margrave Frederick of Bayreuth, tried to put down the rebellion and thus exposed Bayreuth and the surrounding region to repeated reprisals by the Hussites. The Hussites were known to conduct raids purely for the purpose of terrorism – to lay waste to villages without provocation in order to intimidate. In addition to torching buildings, they destroyed crops, killed livestock, and tortured the villagers. (See).

Or just maybe they were planning to leave Bayreuth for Mistelbach because of the devastation. We don't know.

But we do know that she was able to avoid death at the hands of the Hussites. It was reported that most of the inhabitants of Bayreuth fled as the Hussites ravaged the city and, according to contemporary accounts, burned most of the city to the ground. Where did she go when the brutal Hussites looted, raped, tortured, and murdered? The forest? Another village? The Plassenburg Castle in nearby Kulmbach?

It is only an educated guess, but Hans was likely a miller. Records indicate that in these times a mill in Bayreuth was owned by Heintz Dollhopf, and that the mill was located at one of the gates to the city. There is no evidence (at the moment) linking Heintz and Hans. They lived at roughly the same time and could be father/son, brothers, uncle/nephew or cousins. Bayreuth was still small enough that it would have been highly unlikely that two individuals with the same name would not be related.

Millers were relatively wealthy – I emphasize *relatively* because he was still a peasant, but he might have had the resources to obtain investment property in Mistelbach.

That Hans owned the house at *Maximilianstrasse 75* however, is an important clue. We learn about this house from historian Johann Holle, writing in the "History of Bayreuth" in 1901:

In the fifteenth century, the city of Bayreuth was enclosed by a city wall in such a way as it was still partly visible 100 years ago [Holle wrote this 1901]. The wall had only two gates: the upper gate and the lower gate; in addition, another small outlet gate on the Main River, the Mühlthürlein [the "mill gateway"].⁶ The upper gate was located at the house Maximilianstrasse 1 and 2, just as one can easily find out its former location from the name of the lower gate, which is still common today. The lower gate stood in the area of the house Maximilianstrasse No. 75 [building owned by Hans Dollhopf] and was protected by important outworks [buildings protecting the gates]. The gates had gate bridges and gate huts. The bridges spanned the deep moat surrounding the whole town. The moat was completely built in 1426 and the name of the moat remains in front of the lower gate. The gatehouses were built in 1447. In order to enter the town, one had to pass through them, which was still the case until recently with the remaining strongly vaulted gatehouse of the Mühlthürlein (demolished in 1899).⁷

If his house was not a mill, it is evident by this passage that the house nevertheless did occupy a place of prominence – perhaps a customs house or mercantile house of trade. However, the lower gate location, since it was on the river, would be a likely place for a mill.

Mills were most often inherited and passed from father to son for generations, so there is a strong possibility that Heintz could have been Hans' father given the location of Maximilianstrasse 75 and that they had the same last name. This is still a guess.

Hans and his wife had three children that we know of, born roughly in the years 1435 to 1450:

1. **Dietrich** (bet 1435/45 - bet 1499/1511), our 14th great grandfather, acquired the mill in Mistelbach.

⁶ The *Rot Main* ("Red Main") is the river that flows through Bayreuth. The Mistel, the stream from which Mistelbach (*Mistel* = "mistletoe," *bach* = "stream") gets its name, empties into the Red Main in Bayreuth. The village of Mistelbach shares a border with Bayreuth.

⁷ "Geschichte der Stadt Bayreuth von der ältesten Zeit bis 1792. 2. Auflage, durchgesehen und bis zum Jahre 1900 fortgeführt von seinem Sohne Gustav Holle." (History of the city of Bayreuth from the earliest times until 1792. 2nd edition, revised and continued until 1900 by his son Gustav Holle.) Johann Wilhelm Hoile. Bayreuth, Verlag von B. Seligsberg's Antiquariatsbuchhandlung, 1901. P.43

2. **Hans** (bet 1435/45 - bef 1475), appears to have died in his 20s.
3. **Gerhaws** (female) (?-?), married Ulrich Mulner c. May, 1475, lived in Bayreuth.

As previously mentioned, she and Hans lived through the worst of peasant nightmares. In February of 1430 Hussites invaded and plundered Bayreuth, burning down the churches, town hall, and most of the houses. According to the medieval historian Matthäus Merian, writing in 1642, the Hussites acted like wild animals and carried out great acts of cruelty. Historian Gustave Holle described it thus:

...Bayreuth fell on Monday after Candlemas.⁸ Culmbach [a nearby village] was laid in ashes on February 7th, whereupon the enemy continued their march amid terrible devastation to Neustadt an der Aisch [another nearby village]. On their retreat they still devastated Pegnitz and Creussen [nearby villages]; only the city of Wunsiedel was saved by the heroic resistance of its citizens.



Depiction of Hussite invasion, artist unknown. <https://www.historyextra.com/period/medieval/hussite-wars-when-how-what-jan-hus/>

The destruction of the city of Bayreuth was complete. The citizens had put up insignificant resistance, as most of them, following the example of the town council, had fled the city before the arrival of the enemy. Nevertheless, the city was abandoned to the sword, fire, and plunder, whereby the entire city with all public and private buildings, the new road, the Dürschnitz [a

⁸ Candlemass, the religious holiday commemorating the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, is February 2.

chapel] and the Holy Cross, as well as the Altenstadt [old city center] with its church were reduced to ashes. The chapel of St. Jobst on the Allersdorf hill, which had a reputation for great miracles, was also destroyed by the flames. Not even the land was spared; it too was an object of revenge. Gardens, meadows, and fields were devastated, increasing the misfortune of the inhabitants to such an extent that those whom the enemy sword did not kill perished from hunger and grief.⁹

Fortunately, we know that she and husband Hans survived the carnage; court inheritance documents indicate that they lived at least until the late 1450s.

Invaders in medieval times, as is still the case in today's wars, often targeted a town's "industrial" assets – i.e. the mills, the source of a village's food production, without which there would be no means to make flour (nor income for the nobility who owned the mills).

Perhaps the mill where Hans and his wife lived was destroyed, thus the reason Hans bought land in Mistelbach. Were they trying to start anew? They were recently wed and starting a family. Maybe, because of the devastation, they were trying to flee Bayreuth.

Historian Merian reported that by 1444, fourteen years later, Bayreuth had been largely rebuilt and there were about 200 houses at that time. The average size of a peasant family was 5.3 souls, including the parents, so the population would have been about 1,060, a third fewer than the population before the Hussite War. It was not unusual for towns or villages to lose so many people during war and ensuing pestilence.

If Hans was a miller, he enjoyed elevated social status. Mill work required many hands, so his wife likely assisted in the mill. In the Middle Ages millers were often the village bakers as well, perhaps giving us a hint to the origin of the surname Dollhopf, which was a type of cake. (See *Blog #15: Dollhopf Name*). In that era, individuals might have taken the name of the product they produced, or the name of the house in which they were born.

It is worth noting that we are within a generation or two of knowing the first person who used the surname Dollhopf (which at the time was spelled Tolhopf). The use of surnames came to the Franconian region in the mid 1300s.

In the *Lehenbuch* of 1398¹⁰, in which we find the entry listing Hans Tolhopf as a purchaser of 3½ acres in Mistelbach, several of the other landowners in Mistelbach are listed only by one name – they did not have a last name. We are so close.

Their son Dietrich, our 14th great-grandfather, is recorded in the *Mistelbach Chronicle* as the owner of the Mistelbach mill in 1499, long after she and Hans died. Perhaps Dietrich inherited the mill in Bayreuth and sold it before moving to Mistelbach.¹¹

⁹ "Geschichte der Stadt Bayreuth von der ältesten Zeit bis 1792. 2. Auflage, durchgesehen und bis zum Jahre 1900 fortgeführt von seinem Sohne Gustav Holle." (History of the city of Bayreuth from the earliest times until 1792. 2nd edition, revised and continued until 1900 by his son Gustav Holle.) Johann Wilhelm Hoile. Bayreuth, Verlag von B. Seligsberg's Antiquariatsbuchhandlung, 1901. P.43.

¹⁰ The *Lehenbuch*, or "Land Book" was the tax book of Margrave Johann III. It included the list of peasants living in Mistelbach for the purpose of knowing who owed taxes.

¹¹ 1499 is when Dietrich's ownership of the mill was recognized in the Margrave's record of fiefs (land leases). Dietrich could have acquired the mill years earlier, since official records were often recorded well after the date of the actual transaction.

Alas, our oldest known grandmother is not known to us by name. She is buried in time, but thankfully not in the ashes of the Hussite Wars.

Next in the series on Dollhopf women: 14th Great-Grandmother Margarethe NN.

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