



Dollhopf

600 Years in the Baking

Dollhopf Women

This is the 16th essay in a series addressing the life and times of our Dollhopf grandmothers.

5th Great-Grandmother Kunigunde Seuffert (1722-1798)

(also spelled **Seiffert**, **Seiffart**, **Seufferth**, **Seyffert**.)

Birth: 26 Oct 1722

Place of birth: Poppenmühle, ("Poppen Mill")
Mistelbach

Parents: Simon Seuffert, miller, and Magdelena
Zimmerman

Marriage: 12 May 1750

Husband: Johann Dollhopf (13 Jul 1718 – 01 Jun 1771,
52), farmer

Age at marriage: 27

Number of known children: 5

Residence: House #55

Death: 09 Sep 1798

Age at death: 75 (She lived to be the oldest of our
grandmothers until the 20th century)

Cause of death: Dysentery

Kunigunde¹ was born in the Poppenmühle ("Poppen Mill"), one of four mills historically located in Mistelbach. Unlike the other three mills (Dorfmühle, Zeckenmühle, and Schnörleinsmühle), the history of the Poppenmühle before 1721 is not recorded in the Mistelbach Chronicle. I don't know why. It is a bit removed from Mistelbach, about a mile upstream on the Mistel from the Dorfmühle, so perhaps it was recorded in another town.

What "Poppen" means is also obscure. It could have been named after a person. In the Hans Bahlow *Deutsches Namenlexicon* ("Dictionary of German Names"), the derivation of the name *Poppen* is "baby talk" or "babble." Poppen could also mean to make the noise "pop."

We do know, however, that the Poppenmühle was a sawmill. The water wheel powered gears that moved a saw blade up and down. In the late 1600s Kunigunde's grandfather Matthäus Seuffert, our 7th great-grandfather, was the owner. As you read in a previous blog, Matthäus, along with Johann Greißinger and Conradt Schabtag, built the St. Bartholomew Church tower and spire in 1680. Makes sense; Matthäus, the sawyer, provided the wood for the framing of the tower.



Poppenmühle (Poppen Mill) in 2017. *When I stopped by the house in 2017 to take a picture the owners informed me they had no knowledge of previous generations, so I do not know if they are related. I believe that the water wheel for the mill extended from where the two doors are located.*

¹ **Kunigunde**, **Kunigunda**, or **Cunigunde** is a female name of German origin derived from "kuni" (clan, family) and "gund" (war). It was a popular name in medieval Germany because of Saint Kunigunde (AD 975–1040), wife of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry II, ("King" of the Germanic lands). After Henry died, she became a nun, gave up her wealth, and dedicated her life to charitable works. She is buried in the Cathedral of Bamberg, 38 miles from Mistelbach. Her Feast Day is celebrated on March 3.

Matthäus was born in the neighboring village of Gesees; his father was a *Schuster* (“shoemaker”). How he came to own the Poppenmühle is a mystery. He died in 1720, two years before his granddaughter Kunigunde was born.

Kunigunde married Johann Dollhopf and moved into house #55 in May of 1750. They had five children:

1. **Catharina** (29 Mar 1751 – 07 Apr 1751), died after nine days.
2. **Johann** (23 May 1752 – 03 May 1828, 75), our 4th great-grandfather.
3. **Stephan** (19 Jun 1755–15 Jan 1817, 61), married Elizabeth Senger and moved to Oberpreuschwitz, where they had four children, whose descendants still live there today.
4. **Johann** (07 May 1758–10 Sep 1762, 4), died at age 4.
5. **Albrecht** (05 Dec 1761–09 Nov 1795, 33), also known as Albert, married Barbara Kauper and was a farmer. He died “of a raging sickness that led to extreme weakness.”² He had two sons, both called Johann; the older Johann was born in 1788, the younger in 1794. After Albrecht died at the age of 33, his widow Barbara married her nephew Johann Dollhopf, son of Albrecht’s brother Stephan Dollhopf. No children were born to this marriage. Barbara’s younger son Johann had 9 children, three of whom emigrated to America – his son Johann in the 1840s (with his daughter Kate); and his daughters Barbara and Anna, who immigrated to America in the spring of 1854 aboard the ship *Aeolus*. (See *Blog #4: Coming to America* for a complete account of their journey.) Albrecht’s 2nd great-grandson, Conrad (1849-1918), immigrated to America in 1875 and settled on Spring Garden Avenue, Pittsburgh, near our great-grandfather John. Conrad’s grandson, Ewald, moved to McCandless Township, and now lives in Florida. Small world.

Kunigunde’s husband Johann was the first Dollhopf to be a full-time farmer – he did not practice tailoring, the trade of his father and previous four generations of grandfathers. Through inheritance and purchase he enlarged his land holdings to a modest nine acres, barely enough to support a family of five. He was very poor, likely extremely poor, no doubt the cause for four of his grandchildren, who also lived at house #55, to leave for America.

Mistelbach was a difficult place to live in the late 1700s:



Poppenmühle Outbuilding. This structure stands behind the building in the previous picture. It is old; I am uncertain of its original use. To the left, not seen in this picture, are caves, or root cellars, used for the storage of fruits and vegetables. On April 14, 1945, General Patton’s US Third Army marched through Mistelbach on their way to Berlin, and many Mistelbachers were said to have taken refuge in these caves to avoid the American soldiers. They need not have feared, the GIs did no harm.

From left to right: Gisela Dollhopf, wife of Helmut, Helmut Dollhopf (no known relation to us yet), Bernd Hammon, our 3rd cousin who lives in Dollhopf house #19. This picture was taken in 2019.

² Church book.

The second half of the eighteenth century had been a time of rising agricultural prices. Favorable opportunities for farmers existed in many regions of Germany, as for example in Schleswig-Holstein, where the peasants were emancipated as early as 1780 under enlightened conditions, favorable both to landlord and tenant.

In general, however, the condition of the peasant was not an enviable one. To the majority of those who bothered to think about him at that time, he was a brutish creature, by his very nature destined to remain so. The picture of the witless tiller of the soil, animated by low cunning, but an easy dupe of his social superiors, persisted long into the Age of Reason.... Rousseau was one of the first to try and show that the peasant was not constitutionally ignorant and base, but that he was the product of conditions in which he was condemned to live.

The peasant, he wrote in *Emile* (1761), lived like an automaton, ceaselessly occupied with repetitive tasks; he was therefore governed by custom and obedience, not by reason.³

Their lives had to be agonizing. We know this from the many accounts of the period in the Mistelbach Chronicle.

When they married in 1750, Kunnigunde was 27 and Johann was 31, advanced ages even for that time (of course not so advanced today). Delayed marriage was a symptom of poverty. In times of famine and scarcity, people could not afford children. Marriage was postponed until a couple could muster sufficient resources to provide for a family – and be able to prove that to the town council in order to obtain permission to marry.

Johann had very little land; I am sure that he and Kunigunde were struggling mightily to survive. Every day they would have prayed for food.

When Kunnigunde was 18 and Johann 22, before they married, Mistelbach was hit with the first of many recorded weather disasters in the 1700s affecting their crops and livestock.⁴

From the Chronicle we learn that the winter of 1740 was exceptionally severe. Prolonged periods of subzero temperatures and severe storms destroyed the winter wheat crop. (Winter wheat crops typically yielded more grain than the summer wheat crops.)

Peasants were extremely vulnerable to swings in crop production because the land did not produce as much per acre as it does today, and food was perishable – there was no refrigeration, and the technology for the long-term storage of food stuffs did not exist, except for the salting of meats and vegetables such as cabbage, which we know as *sauerkraut*. But the German nobility maintained monopolies on salt, and by keeping the prices high they created widespread shortages.

I am certain that Johann and Kunigunde were barely able to produce and keep enough for their survival, and that included the grains and forage necessary to feed whatever livestock they had. In times of scarcity, the livestock would be the first to go. If they didn't die from lack of food, they died of disease or froze to death.

Perhaps the situation would not have been so devastating in 1740 except for the unfortunate fact that severe winter conditions caused crop failures again two years later in 1742. Two such hits to these peasants in immediate succession caused widespread upheaval and suffering. It is no wonder that Johann and Kunnigunde did not, indeed could not, marry in these times of scarcity and suffering.

³ A Social History of Germany, 1648-1914 by Eda Sagarra

⁴ Of course, there would have been weather related disasters in earlier generations, but more detailed and accurate information was only becoming available in the 1700s.

They married eight years later in 1750, and shortly thereafter, in 1754 and 1755, the village was *again* beset by severe weather. The Chronicle understatedly reported, "...there was great need."

In that severe winter of their young marriage Kunigunde had a two-year-old running around the house, and she was pregnant with her third; in June of 1755 she would give birth to son Stephan.

Imagine their "house:" half-timbered walls of wood and daub, a mixture of straw, mud, and manure; the wind whistling through every crack; a roof of thatched straw; windows with no glass, only shutters; a dirt floor covered with hay.

Imagine the task of keeping warm, of collecting firewood in frigid conditions and tending a fire day and night, weeks and months on end.

Just how tough was it? Her first baby Catherina died in 1751 after nine days, and her fourth child, also named Johann, died at the age of four. We don't know for sure, but malnutrition might have played a role, if not poverty induced diseases such as dysentery, typhus, pneumonia, and tuberculosis.

In the years from 1740 to 1760, while Mistelbach was suffering from serial crop failures and famine, nearby Bayreuth was experiencing a Golden Age due to the reign of Margrave Frederick and his wife Margravine Wilhelmina. They built the magnificent Baroque Margravian Opera House in 1748, and the New Palace in the "Baroque Rococo" style in 1754.



Medieval woven wood walls packed with daub. Daub is a mixture of straw, mud, and manure. Photo Maggie Land Blanck, 2014; Detmold Open Air Museum.



Neues Schloss ("New Castle"), Bayreuth, 1754. Contrast the walls of the peasant house above with these walls. This magnificent castle, built by the Margrave Frederick and his wife Wilhelmina in the Bayreuth Rococo style was a mere four miles from the peasant farmhouse of Kunigunde and Johann Dollhopf. What could they have possibly thought of this ostentatious building? Maybe they were proud, but given the general torment experienced by the peasant population, I would guess they were resentful. Under the Margrave and his wife, Bayreuth was experiencing a Golden Age.

While Bayreuth was experiencing its Golden Age, the rest of the world was engaged in what Winston Churchill called the first world war: the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). This war involved all of the great European powers of the day: England, France, Spain, Prussia, and Austria (Germany as we know it today did not exist until 1871).

The Seven Years' War was perhaps the first global war, taking place almost 160 years before World War I.... The war restructured not only the European political order, but also affected events all around the world, paving the way for the beginning of later British world supremacy in the 19th century, the rise of Prussia in Germany (eventually replacing Austria as the leading German state), the beginning of tensions in British North America, as well as a clear sign of France's revolutionary turmoil. It was characterized in Europe by sieges and the arson of towns as well as open battles with heavy losses.⁵

We know this war in the US as the French and Indian War, the precursor to our Revolutionary War of Independence.



Princess Friederike Sophie Wilhelmine of Prussia married Frederick, Margrave of Brandenburg-Bayreuth in 1731. The favorite sister of the Prussian King Frederick the Great, she helped spare the Mistelbach area from the ravages of the Seven Years War, the real first world war.

Although much of central Europe was engulfed in the war, Mistelbach largely escaped. Margravine Wilhelmina, principal architect of the Bayreuth Golden Age, was the favorite sister of the Prussian king Frederick the Great, a principal combatant in the Seven Years War. He thankfully spared Bayreuth and the Frankish kingdom from devastation.

Although spared from war, starvation still chased our ancestors. Again in 1770 and 1772, when Johann and Kunigunde were in their fifties, Mistelbach suffered poor harvests, these times due to severe *summer* storms. These wind- or hail- storms (likely microbursts) wiped out entire crops. From the Chronicle:

1770/72: Again, two bad harvests due to big tempests. The supplies were soon exhausted, and the number of the starving grew. Grain and wheat was imported to Bayreuth via Danzig and somewhat alleviated the need.

If you were among the poorest, like Johann and Kunigunde, you were the first to go hungry.

The suffering was due not only to crop failure. As was usually the case, hyperinflation followed the crop failures due to desperation – peasants were willing to pay anything for scarce food stuffs. Prices soared, out of the reach of the poor. They were taken advantage of by usurers, disreputable men who charged inflated prices for grain imported from other areas:

The extraordinary inflation, which occurred in 1771 not only in Franconia but in the whole of Germany, also hit the city of Bayreuth [next to Mistelbach] very hard. Shortly before the harvest of the year 1770 one did not believe that the crops would fail so severely. Nobody therefore thought of buying supplies; rather, usurers began to bring the grain from abroad. As a result, this

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Years%27_War

inflation far exceeded that of the earlier ones in 1710, 1740 and 1762. Already in the autumn of 1770, against all odds, grain rose by more than half of the summer price, grain from 15 groschen⁶ to 34 groschen, barley from 7 groschen to 16 groschen.⁷

How bad was it? Even the birds were starving!

In the winter the Emmerlings [a type of small songbird] flew into the houses because of hunger and died on the spot.⁸

These were desperate times:

“On 25 July 1771, in addition to the persistent rain, there was a terrible hailstorm which beat the crops to the ground in the surrounding area for 10 miles in every direction. The damage was estimated at 1,540 Simra.⁹ From Gesees to Plos and from Glasshütten to Berneck [villages surrounding Mistelbach] the grain and especially the seeds in the flower were mostly destroyed. Nothing was heard from all places but weeping and lamenting.



Even the Emmerlings were starving because of the lack of food. “Emmerling” is Bavarian dialect for a bunting – a small, colorful, songbird. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bunting_\(bird\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bunting_(bird))



Today, because of modern farming techniques, the fields around Mistelbach are lush. Not so when Johann and Kunigunde farmed these fields. They suffered at least six years of devastating crop failures during their lifetimes. St. Bartholomew, the Mistelbach Church, is in the distance. Picture taken 2019.

The peasants mowed some of their cornfields and sowed them again with barley; but because of the persistent heat, nothing came of it. Glasshütten, Pittersdorf, Heinersreuth, Bindloch, Benk, etc. suffered the most. Everybody was starving to death; the peasants thanked their farmworkers for their work and they then ran away. Some poor people did not see a bite of bread in eight to 14 days, but lived on potatoes, which had risen in price to 10-12 groschen and became rare. In addition to this shortage there was also a plague. The pity and misery reached the highest summit in 1772. Daily services were held in the church.”¹⁰

Johann did not survive. He died on June 1, 1771 at the age of 52. From the church book we learn that, “He suffered 14-day-long chest sickness.” Doesn’t sound like the plague, or

⁶ A *groschen* was roughly equivalent to a penny, in those places and times a lot of money.

⁷ Holle, J.W. (1901). *Geschichte der Stadt Bayreuth (History of the City of Bayreuth)* Bayreuth.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Unknown unit of currency.

¹⁰ Holle, Ibid.

even tuberculosis, which causes the body to waste away over months, not 14 days. Maybe he died of acute stress, or a heart attack. Only a guess.

Kunigunde, however, was a survivor.

She was 49 when Johann died, and she lived another 26 years, dying on September 9, 1798 at the age of 75. She never remarried and lived to know 12 of her 14 grandchildren. This was an extraordinary occurrence in the 1700s since marriage and childbearing were delayed, and people typically died in their 50s or 60s.

She died of dysentery, an illness caused by filthy living conditions and poor sanitation. Death by dysentery, especially among children, was common among the poorest of our great-grandparents. (See *Blog 32: 11th Great-Grandmother Margaretha Groß*).

I hope that she found some joy in knowing her grandchildren. She was the longest lived of our known direct grandmothers until great-grandmother Elizabeth Bender died in 1951 at the age of 94.

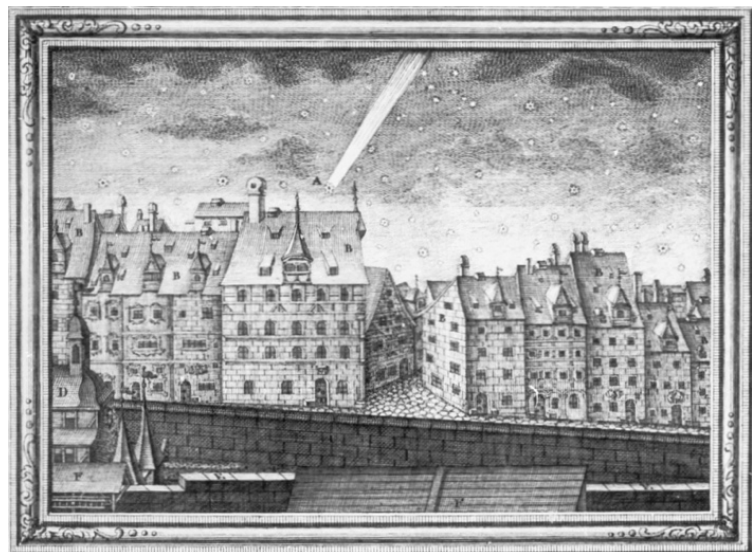
Was there a bright spot in Kunnigunde's life?

Yes, quite literally.

On a hot August 14th night in the summer of 1769, they called their three boys (at least I imagine it this way) – Johann 17, Stephan 15, and Albrecht, 7 – to the rear of their house #55 at about one hour past midnight. There, in the southwestern sky, visible only from the rear of the house because the house faced northeast, they witnessed a most extraordinary event.

The sky was afire, lit by the brilliant tail of what today has been labeled the Great Comet, known by astronomers as comet C/1769 P1.¹¹

In a village without electricity or gas, lit only by tallow candles or flaxseed oil lamps, the brightness must have been stunning. The precise location in the sky and the time – *stund von Mitternacht gegen Südwest* (“one hour from midnight in the southwest”) was recorded in the Mistelbach Chronicle.



The Great Comet of 1769 over Nürnberg by Paul Kufner, ca. 1769. Note the size of the tail compared to the buildings. It first became visible in the night sky over Mistelbach on August 14, 1769, eight days after it was discovered by French astronomer Charles Messier six days earlier. Nürnberg is 50 miles from Mistelbach.

The comet was visible over the next few months, reaching its maximum brightness on September 22nd. The tail reached a length of 90 degrees, stretching roughly half the distance across the night sky.

What wonderment for the peasants! Comets were believed to be omens of major events, typically births or deaths of pivotal figures (Jesus Christ for one – the “star” of Bethlehem is theorized to have been a comet, possibly Halley’s comet), and, although they could not have known it at the time, Napoleon was born on the next day,

¹¹ It is technically called a “great” comet because of its outstanding brightness. It was discovered by French astronomer Charles Messier on August 8, 1769, and is sometimes referred to as the Messier Comet.

August 15th. Given their medieval superstitions, I am sure that our Mistelbach grandparents saw this as a sign from God – maybe an end to their sufferings, or sadly, a beginning.

It is estimated that the comet's previous visit to earth was in 300 BC. It's next perihelion passage (the time at which it is closest to our sun and visible to us) will be in the year 3420 – 1,400 years from now. If you are reading this today in the year 2023, the comet will next be visible by your 47th great grandchildren.¹²

I wonder if these words, this family history, will survive to that time. I wonder if humanity will still exist, and if so, what life will be like for our 47th great grandchildren in the year 3420.

I wonder.

Next in the series on Dollhopf women: 4th Great-grandmother Anna Catherina Hagen

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New Haven, CT
January 2, 2023.



The Comet or Tail Star visible from the Amstel lock in Amsterdam, etching by Aart Schouman, 1769. This comet will next visit earth and be seen by our 47th great-children in the year 3420 – 1,400 years from now.

¹² Assuming the generations average 30 years – the average of our Dollhopfs since 1400.