



Dollhopf

600 Years in the Baking

Dollhopf Women

This is the 17th essay in a series addressing the life and times of our Dollhopf grandmothers.

4th Great-Grandmother Anna Catherina Hagen (1754-1823)

Birth: 07 Jan 1754

Place of birth: House #19, Mistelbach

Parents: Stephan Hagen and Catharina Bär

Marriage: 20 Oct 1774

Husband: Johann Dollhopf (23 May 1752–03 May 1828, 75), farmer

Age at marriage: 20

Number of known children: 6

Residence: House #19, next to St. Bartholomäus

Death: 19 Feb 1823

Age at death: 69

Cause of death: Cough and “narrow chest” (likely tuberculosis)

In their lifetime, Anna Catharina (she used the name Catharina) and her husband Johann were citizens of four countries: the Principality of Bayreuth, the Kingdom of Prussia (1791), the Republic of France (1806), and the Kingdom of Bavaria (1810).

And they never left Mistelbach!

Geopolitical forces were changing the contours of Europe and Catharina and Johann were caught in the middle.

Catharina was born in house #19, the site occupied by the Dollhopf house today. We don't know exactly what the house looked like in 1754 when she was born; that house burned down in the 1821 “Great Fire” of Mistelbach. The house that appears today was built in 1823; sadly she did not live to see it completed as she died in February of 1823. In the intervening year she lived at house #55 with her in-laws.

Her father Stephan Hagen was a quarryman and stone mason; her grandfather Conradt Hagen was a stone mason; and her great-grandfather Simon, who acquired the property in the early 1700s, was a butcher. The house was originally acquired by her 3rd great-grandfather Hans Hagen in 1646, so our ancestors – Hagen and Dollhopf – have been living at this address for nearly 400 years.

The occupation given in the church book for her great-grandfather Simon Hagen was *landmetzger*, a description that speaks to the relationship that Mistelbach had with the neighboring “city” of Bayreuth. Simon was commonly, in German, known as a *landfleischer*. In southern Germany and Mistelbach, the dialect was *landmetzger* (land = “country;” metzger = “butcher”), which was known in the local regional culture specifically as “a butcher in the country who brings meat to the city for sale.”¹

Not just a butcher, but a butcher who brings meat to the city. Mistelbach was a small village; Bayreuth, much larger, was a market town, distinguished by a commercial market square. Whatever their trade, peasants from Mistelbach likely made the four-mile trek to the market square in Bayreuth to sell their wares and produce, in Simon's case, meat.

From the Chronicle we learn what wares the Mistelbachers might have peddled in the Bayreuth market square. Most of the Mistelbach villagers were of course farmers, but the following trades were listed in Mistelbach in a tax report from the year 1851:

¹ Deutsches Wörterbuch (German Wordbook) Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, 1854.

One innkeeper who was also a butcher and a *Krämer* (“one who has a stall in a market”), four weavers, five millers, two tailors, a blacksmith, two shoemakers, a saddle master, six weavers, five bricklayers, a carpenter, a stone mason, a glass cutter, and a wagon coach driver.

A lot to sell. The road from Mistelbach to Bayreuth was well plied.



Baireuth [sic] c. 1850. Lithograph by Gustav Kraus (1804-1852). This depiction of Bayreuth from the 1800s gives a sense of the scale of the medieval town and the surrounding countryside. I do not know from which direction we are viewing the town in this lithograph, but this road or path could easily have been the road from Mistelbach, which bordered Bayreuth. Farmers' fields, as shown, surrounded the towns and villages where the houses were clustered. Bayreuth was a much larger town than Mistelbach. In 1850 the population of Mistelbach was about 450 (they had just lost 180 to emigration, many more were to follow); Bayreuth numbered in the many thousands. Bayreuth was a so-called "market city" because they had a central square for commerce. Our ancestors traveled these paths to visit the market to buy or sell their wares, and to visit the courts for legal reasons. There were no paved roads in villages such as Mistelbach, and passage was extremely difficult in rain or snow. You will note above the double spired church in Bayreuth. Our 15th great-grandfather Hans Tolhopf lived within blocks of that church in the early 1400s.

Catharina married Johann on October 20, 1774; they were both 20 years of age, which, given the extreme poverty of the era, was an exceptionally early age to get married.

Well, apparently not so exceptional. They were so young because Catharina was... ahem, seven months pregnant when she "walked to the church."² The entry in the church book:

² The metaphor for getting married, since the bride would come to the house of the groom (or the house where they would live), consummate the union, then walk to the church for the wedding.

Catharina Hagen, surviving legitimate oldest daughter of the deceased Stephan Hagen, a local quarryman and journeyman mason, who in disgraceful manner had intercourse, after the grant of the most gracious government decree got married in silence on October 20, 1774.

Now, I would like to think that they were the Romeo and Juliet of our ancestors. Damn poverty! Be gone, judgmental parents and town council! No one would keep this young couple apart....

Town Councils, representatives of the margrave, had to approve marriages, and apparently could have denied marriage for Johann and Catharina given their infraction. Hence the comment, “of the most gracious government decree.”

“Got married in silence” was a formal ritual, not just a description of the congregation’s scorn. The couple was expected to approach the altar and kneel to atone for their sin while the congregation cast their disapproving looks. Of course, we think nothing of this today, but this is the way a village tried to maintain order in a culture that depended on the sanctity of marriage, mostly for economic reasons. If the family structured was threatened by random extramarital births, so was the basis for their economy.

Catharina and Johann probably felt overwhelmed. Given their impoverishment, they likely knew that they would never be able to meet the newly imposed financial requirements for marriage – hurdles that governments placed in front of young people to prevent, or at least postpone, marriage. The available food supply, because of famine, poverty, and the small farms, could not sustain the rise in population.

Such hurdles to marriage included the payment of stiff fees, and the presentation of financial affidavits from their parents, proving they would be able to sustain a family. Young people often waited to marry until the prospective husband knew which trade or property he might inherit.

Despite the taboos against illegitimate children, the authorities probably felt pressured to allow them to marry to preserve some semblance of social order. The situation for the village, however, would get worse.

In a few short years illegitimate births would become common – Johann and Catharina’s great-grandson Johann had four illegitimate children, including our great-grandfather, John Dollhopf.

I digress.

Johann and Catharina, our Romeo and Juliet, had six children:

1. **Stephan** (26 Dec 1774 – 29 Nov 1846, 71), married Barbara Kauper and moved to the Flinkenmühle. He was listed as a tenant farmer, a farmer who did not own land, and was thus he was probably a day laborer and very, very poor. In what was close to incest, he married his uncle Albrecht’s widow, Barbara. (I believe that such a marriage was a sign of poverty.) Barbara was ten years older than he when they married. She had two children, both named Johann Dollhopf, with Albrecht. Therefore, Stephan’s stepsons were also his first cousins.³ Stephan and Barbara did not have children. If they did Stephan’s children would have been siblings and first cousins at the same time. Barbara died at the age of 66 and Stephan then married Catharina NN, the widow of Caspar Adler from Heimersreuth. They did not have any children.
2. **Kunigunda** (22 Apr 1777 – 18 Sep 1803, 26), died unmarried. She died of “nervous fever,” known today as typhoid, caused by ingesting salmonella tainted food. Typhoid is typical of poor, filthy conditions.
3. **Johann** (05 May 1780 – 15 Aug 1784, 4), died as young boy of dysentery, caused by ingesting fecal contaminated food or water.

³ Could this be any more confusing?

4. **Johann** (05 Jun 1784 – 26 Jul 1784, 27 days), died as infant. The cause of death was not indicated in the church books, but he died a month before his four-year-old brother, who died of dysentery – likely his cause of death as well.
5. **Johann** (05 Dec 1789 – 11 Feb 1867, 81), married Magdalena Popp, daughter of the owner of the Thalmühle (mill) in nearby Eckersdorf. They had one child, Barbara. He lived to the ripe old age of 81 after suffering “narrow chest after a 14-day-long sickbed.”
6. **Eberhard** (21 Jan 1789 – 22 Nov 1843, 54), our 3rd great-grandfather. More about him in the next blog.

This family was likely among the poorest of our ancestors, evidenced in part by the childhood deaths caused by dysentery and typhoid. They were not alone, Mistelbach, indeed most of Germany, suffered.

When Johann married Catharina in December of 1774, he moved into her house, #19 – perhaps another sign of the poverty of the Dollhopf family since, as the oldest son, Johann would typically have invited his bride Catharina to live in his house. But the Dollhopf house #55 where Johann was living was very small, with little property, and there was little chance there to sustain a family.

Living in Catharina’s house #19 at that time were Catharina, age 20, her sister Kunigunda, age 18, another sister Margarethe, age 8, and their mother Catharina, age 47. Their father Stephan Hagen died three years earlier in 1771 at the age of 45. Three of Catharina’s siblings already died as infants or young children, and her younger sister Margarethe would die ten years later at the age of 18 – so, four of Catharina’s siblings, out of six, did not survive to adulthood, again an indicator of intense poverty.

Assuming there were no other male relatives living there at the time, Johann became the man of the household, a household that had been without a man for three years. It is likely that his mother-in-law Catharina was having trouble putting food on the table because there were no men to plow, sow, or harvest, the fields. I would guess that the mother and three girls living there were close to starvation, relying on the help of neighbors and relatives.

Johann acquired house #19 and the farm from his mother-in-law Catharina in 1784, but only received the official letter of investiture on February 4, 1799, 15 years later. Appendix A at the end of this blog for a photo of the letter. Following is the text:

Johann Dollhopf Bayreuth
Letter of investiture with farm # 19
Staatsarchiv, D-96047 Bamberg:
Amtsgericht Bayreuth, Verträge, "D", 2/1808.

4 February 1799

We, Friederich Wilhelm,⁴ by the grace of God King of Prussia, prince-elect of Brandenburg, burgrave of Nürnberg, above and below Gebürg, etc., hereby document and confirm to the public, that We lawfully and honestly furnished our dear faithful Johann Dollhopf from Mistelbach with a continuous hereditary fief⁵ consisting of a farm thereat, located opposite church and graveyard, where formerly home and barn stood, and an orchard, in the size of 1/8 tagwerk;⁶ including the field specified on page 341 b, in the size of ½ tagwerk, located in the Warmsreuth district. For changing the quality of a masculine fief⁷ and cancelling the case-of-death fee he pays an annual rent of 1.12 guilders to the local treasury. All of this was

⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm III, King of Prussia. By this time Johann and Catharina were Prussian citizens because in 1792 Margrave Alexander sold Mistelbach to Prussia.

⁵ Original: "durchgehendes Erbzinslehen." A fief was a feudal lease.

⁶ *Tagwerk* ("day's work") was a plot of land equal to the amount of ground that could be plowed in a day's work, or slightly smaller than an acre. A tagwerk differed dramatically from village depending on how easy it was to plow. A tagwerk would be smaller in hilly, rocky, terrain because plowing was more difficult.

⁷ Change from a fief that only a man could inherit, to a fief that a woman could inherit as well.

immediately transferred to him by his wife Margaretha⁸ née Hagen, who had inherited this together with her sister Cunigunda nee Hagen after her mother's death,⁹ who was the deceased Catharina widowed Hagen, and had taken it over in the succeeding estate distribution. Besides the judicial approval fee in the amount of 60 guilders, that his wife and sister-in-law were jointly liable to, he had to pay the quit-rent and also a fee for the most deplorable death of Our highly-respected Father and Majesty.

We bestow on him, Johann Dollhopf from Mistelbach, this farm and orchard thereat, in the customary way and according to the law, by virtue of this letter, so that he and all of his heirs of male and female sex in the future shall have, take and receive this as a continuous hereditary fief from Us and Our successors, according to custom and law, as often as is necessary, however, without prejudice to Us and Our successors' rights, and the rights of any third party, without malice.

Authenticated by the bigger seal of the 2nd senate, Our government as the Feudal Court, and usual signature.

Done in Bayreuth, February 4, 1799.

Given the 15-year delay in recording this investiture, there is some confusion about when Johann actually acquired the property. In the same court files, we find the following order of events:

- 1) February 14, 1722: Anna's great grandfather Simon Hagen, butcher in Mistelbach, sold the property to his son Conrad Hagen.
- 2) October 24, 1743: Conrad dies. His widow Margaretha inherits it, and some point she passes it to her only living child Stephan.
- 3) March 14, 1771: Stephan dies. His widow Catharina inherits it on May 29, 1772.
- 4) 1784: House acquired by Johann Dollhopf, husband of Stephan and Catharina's oldest daughter Anna Catharina, who were both living in the house since 1774.
- 5) June 16, 1798: Catharina, husband of Stephan dies. According to the above document Anna Catharina and her sister Kunigunde inherit the property, and after the appropriate payout to Kunigunde, the property is inherited by Anna Catharina's husband Johann.
- 6) February 4, 1799: Formal decree above assigning ownership to Johann.

So, although the investiture states that he acquired the farm in 1799, other court entries indicate that he had purchased the property in 1784. Perhaps the 1784 purchase was merely within the family, and no one bothered to report it. Maybe in 1799 they were seeking official sanctioning for the purposes of inheritance.

Or maybe the wheels of government just turned slowly.

Note that the above document was decreed by Friederich Wilhelm, King of Prussia. In 1791, Margrave Alexander of Bayreuth sold the principality to the King, largely to settle the debts of his father. He used the remaining proceeds to fund his retirement in England.

⁸ In fact her name is Anna Catharina, as it is documented in her vital records.

⁹ The mother died in 1798, so this statement is in some conflict with the information provided in the same file that Johann Dollhopf acquired this farm from the Hagen family already in 1784.

It is not likely that the change in citizenship had much of an impact on Catharina and Johann. Local customs and laws remained in effect, and life went on.

Severe weather continued in this generation to wreak havoc on the village. From the Mistelbach Chronicle we learn that in January of 1776 there was "such a terrible cold, lasting almost the entire month, that even the root cellars froze, and that a lot of livestock froze to death."

This could be near disastrous, as oxen were needed to plow the fields, and cows needed for milk. Catharina's first-born son Stephan was 13 months old in that very cold January; we might wonder how he survived.

Misfortune struck again two years later on the night of July 8, 1778. "There was again a great storm with a lot of hail, which destroyed almost all the crops." Stephen was 3½ and his young sister was 1½. If the crops were almost all destroyed, this meant that the coming year would be difficult – very little, if anything to eat, and little to feed the livestock (if they had any).

Johann and Catharina couldn't catch a break. It is hard to determine whether they suffered more than previous generations, or whether we know more about the storms and their other afflictions because of more detailed and frequent record keeping in the 1700s and 1800s.

It was during, and I posit because of, these very difficult times in the 1770s that Pietism¹⁰ – a revivalist movement – reached Mistelbach, resulting in a "flourishing community life."¹¹

Originating with the work of Lutheran theologian Philipp Spener in the late 1600s, Pietism emphasized a personal transformation through spiritual rebirth and renewal, not unlike the revivalist movements in America led by Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Joel Osteen, and host of other televangelists.

Eighteenth century German Pietism emphasized a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, thus taking personal responsibility for living a Christian life. This was very much unlike the impersonal routinization of customary church life, where one had an indirect relationship to God through saints and the pastor.

For peasants, religion was mechanical. Attending church was not something you chose to do; it was

Life was tough...for Anna and Johann life was a cascade of catastrophic events:

1770/72: *Two bad harvests due to big tempests. The supplies were soon exhausted, and the number of the starving grew.*

1771 July: *persistent rain, terrible hailstorm destroyed nearly all the grain. Nothing was heard from all places but weeping and lamenting.*

1771 winter: *Sever inflation and starvation. Even the Emmerlings (small birds) flew into the houses because of hunger and died on the spot.*

1776 January: *Deep freeze, crops destroyed, cattle die.*

1777 February: *relatives leave to fight in America.*

1778 July: *hail and windstorm wipe out crops.*

1784 June: *first son Johann dies at age 4 of dysentery.*

1784 July: *second son Johann dies at age 27 days one month later, probably of dysentery.*

1802: *Abnormal weather, heavy snow, swarms of field mice destroyed almost the entire harvest in this year.*

1803 September: *unmarried daughter Kunigunde dies at age 26 of typhoid.*

1804 May: *Abnormal weather and Kohlweissling ("cabbage caterpillar") infestation wipe out crops.*

1806 October and following years: *intermittent occupation of their house by French troops.*

1808: *Johann and Catherina deed the farm to Eberhard when he was only 19.*

1816: *"The Year Without Summer," massive crop failures throughout Europe for next three years.*

1817: *Severe inflation, hunger, and famine.*

1817 July: *A terrible tempest wipes away crops.*

1822 August: *Their house burns down. They move to house #55 for one year.*

1823 February: *Catherina dies before house is rebuilt, age 69.*

1828 May: *Johann dies, age 75.*

¹⁰ Also known as Pietistic Lutheranism.

¹¹ Mistelbach Chronicle.

the law. Well, not exactly *the* law, you couldn't be arrested, but centuries of tradition and custom, accompanied by the commonly held notion that if you didn't go to church you were condemned to hell, sent people to the pews every Sunday. (Well, not every Sunday. The church holds at best 150 people, but there were about 400 people in the village.)

You showed up, listened to readings of the narrowly prescribed official canon, sat impatiently while *Herr Pastor* sermonized (railing against female immorality no doubt, among other of *his* perceived sins), sang a few hymns (but only if you were a man; women were not allowed to sing), were forgiven for your sins, took communion, and went home.

There is also plenty of evidence from the Mistelbach church books that in similar fashion not all pastors took an active interest in their congregants – there are mentions of pastors who, showing little interest, assigned church duties such as baptisms and funerals, to assistants, and were little seen by the parishioners.

Church was enjoyed for social reasons; it was indeed a break from the grind and tedium of subsistence farming. Church was a social convention, not a personal decision – until Pietism.

Pietism is important to this discussion because of the influence and participation of women in this movement. In order to better understand what constituted the Christian life, villagers (largely women) met in small groups to read and study the Bible *for themselves*, not subject to the indoctrination or personal opinions of the pastor. Such small group participants were called Pietists.

Did Catharina, or Johann, participate in such groups?

It would not surprise anyone that women, more so than men, would seek a more personal relationship with Jesus. Indeed, the movement was largely associated with an awakening among women who were tacitly challenging the oppressive male hierarchies of church and civil state. By reading (if they could) Scripture for themselves, they were going to discover what the Bible really had to say about living a Christian life.

And given the terrible circumstances of their lives, it is no wonder they sought comfort from a personal relationship with Jesus – not a impersonal Jesus imposed on them by church authorities or tradition.

Circumstances were so dire that some of the Mistelbachers were willing to go to war and take their chances in the New World.

On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, issued the United States Declaration of Independence. You wouldn't think that this would matter much to Johann and Catharina who lived in a remote rural village in central Germany. They probably didn't hear about it for weeks, or months, if they even heard about it at all.

But eight months later, on a February evening in 1777, they were likely among the crowd that gathered in Bayreuth to send off some of their neighbor's sons to fight in the War of the *American* Revolution.

How did this happen?

Many of the independent German "kingdoms" (Germany was not yet a unified nation, not until 1871) were known for their standing armies – not so much for their own defense, but rather an important source of mercenary income for the rulers. Many margraves and other nobles "rented," or sold, their armies to other nobles, indeed other foreign kingdoms, as guns for hire.

King George III of England needed soldiers to fight the American colonists, and he turned to the Germans for help.

Christian Friedrich Karl Alexander, the Margrave of Bayreuth, answered the call. After all, he was family – George III was his second cousin once removed – *and* Protestant.¹² King George only sought help from Protestant kingdoms, not Catholic. Margrave Alexander “sold” 1,000 soldiers from the Bayreuth area, including Mistelbach, to King George. More than a third of the soldiers who fought on the side of the British in the War of the American Revolution were German mercenaries.¹³

From the church book:

In 1777, on the 28th of February, the Margrave sold 1,000 soldiers, all from the margraviate [of Bayreuth], to America. The agony and the tears of the families were indescribable.

As near as I can tell from diaries kept by several of these mercenary soldiers, there were at least two young men, possibly three, from Mistelbach in the contingent: Heinrich Pfaffenberger and Johann Bär, both related to Johann and Catharina. Admittedly they were 4th cousins, so they might not have known they were related, but they were close neighbors. (Who isn't a neighbor in a village of a few hundred people where everyone goes to the same church and school?)

The Pfaffenberger family at one time owned house #54, next to the Dollhopf house #55, owned at the time by Johann's nephew Johann. Whether they lived there in 1777 is not known, but we do know that somewhere in the village lived Georg and Kunigunde Pfaffenberger, and their four sons – Heinrich, 26 years old; Johann, 25; Heinrich, 24; and Johann, 16. (Yes, there were two Heinrichs and two Johanns.)

One of the Heinrichs, we don't know which, volunteered. Or was drafted. Heinrich was Johann's 4th cousin, and Catharina's 4th



Margrave Christian Friedrich Karl Alexander (1736 – 1806) was the last margrave of Bayreuth. In 1777 he sold more than 1,000 soldiers from his principality, which included Mistelbach, to King George III of England to fight the American colonists in the Revolutionary War. Fourteen years later, in 1791 he sold his principalities of Bayreuth and Ansbach to King Fredrich Wilhelm II of Prussia and used the proceeds to retire to England. So, Catharina and Johann became citizens of the northern German kingdom of Prussia, whose capital at the time was Berlin.

¹² Many European monarchs were related – intermarried for the purposes of keeping noble blood lines “pure” and forming alliances between kingdoms.

¹³ Technically they were not “mercenaries” since the soldiers themselves did not profit directly from King George. The proper term was “auxiliaries” since the soldiers were leased to King George by Margrave Alexander. Alexander was the one who profited.

cousin as well – he was a blood cousin to *both*.¹⁴

The other soldier, Johann Bär, was likely born in the Schnorleinsmühle (an educated guess), where our great-grandfather would eventually be born to Margarethe Bär of the same family.

From diary accounts of the day, the soldiers marched out of Bayreuth, bound for the Atlantic coast and the ships that would take them to America. Heinrich's and Johann Bär's parents were likely among the many who came to tearfully watch their sons march off to war. Perhaps the neighboring Dollhopfs Johann and Catharina, with their two small children, attended the sendoff as well; if not they might have waved to the troops as they marched by the house. Amidst the tedium of peasant life, this was a big deal.

I have chronicled the exploits of these mercenary soldiers – our relatives – in *Blog #13: Dollhopfs and the American Revolution*. Their stories were told in several diaries that have since been published and are available today.

Heinrich Pfaffenberger and Johann Bär never made it back to Mistelbach. Heinrich died on March 6, 1779 of scurvy after the Battle of Rhode Island, and was buried near Newport, Rhode Island. Johann, captured at the Battle of Yorktown, where Washington defeated Cornwallis, escaped in October of 1782 and joined the Virginia militia, the other side, never to be heard from again.

Meanwhile, back in Mistelbach, there were more years of crop failures:

1802: Abnormal weather conditions destroyed almost the entire harvest in this year, and all hopes of pleasant times disappeared. The winter fruits [winter wheat] had already collapsed in winter; even late in May heavy snow and frost hindered the vegetation; later, unbelievable quantities of field mice appeared.¹⁵

In 1804 the crops again failed, this time because of the *Kohlweissling* ("cabbage white butterfly"), the female of which lays her eggs on the underside of plants in May and June, the hatched caterpillars then making a meal of the affected crops:

1804: As a result of the abnormal weather conditions on the one hand and the war unrest in the European countries on the other hand, the conditions began to worsen.... The poor population was in great need and therefore potatoes and bran had to be baked into the bread. In addition, there was a poor harvest in the autumn. The harvest in this year was also unfavorable. Persistent rainy weather and the caterpillar of the *Kohlweissling*, which appeared in large masses, caused great damage. Only the herbs, oats etc. and the potato harvest turned out well, so that the emergency was somewhat alleviated.¹⁶

War would again touch the lives of Johann and Anna, but in a much more personal and threatening manner.

On October 14, 1806, in his quest to conquer Europe, Napoleon attacked the troops of King Frederick William III of Prussia at the Battle of Jena, about 90 miles north of Mistelbach.

A week before that battle, on Tuesday October 7, a contingent of French troops under the command of Marshal Ney, on their way to the Battle of Jena, encamped in Mistelbach. According to the church book, 320 soldiers occupied Mistelbach; four officers and five soldiers made themselves at home in the parsonage across the street from the Dollhopf house.

¹⁴ Johann and Catharina were themselves fifth cousins once removed. More on this phenomenon can be found in *Blog #7 Pedigree Collapse*.

¹⁵ Mistelbach Chronicle

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, History of Bayreuth.

It is not known exactly if, or how many, soldiers “invaded” the Dollhopf house, but in a village of only 50 or 60 houses it is safe to assume that a number of those 320 soldiers occupied the Dollhopf house, which was, after all, situated across the street from the parsonage.

Thankfully, it was reported that the soldiers did not do any damage. Damage or not, I can’t imagine what it would be like to have foreign enemy soldiers making themselves at home in my house. Heaven knows what Johann and Catharina experienced. I think it could very well be assumed that the soldiers helped themselves to whatever food and drink was available, not to mention whatever loot they thought was worth the taking.

Perhaps they only stayed one or two nights; they were, after all, on their way to a battle. But the church book mentions that French troops revisited Mistelbach frequently over the next nine years!

Nine years! *Pouvez-vous parler français?*

After Napoleon defeated Prussia at the Battle of Jena, Mistelbach (which had been sold to Prussia in 1792) became a military province of France, subject to French troop occupation. Napoleon sold the territory to Bavaria on June 30, 1810.

There were only three living in the house at the time of French occupation – Johann, 54; Catharina, 52; and their unmarried son Eberhard, 17. Perhaps for the next six years life on the farm was peaceful, despite the delightful visitations by French troops.

But then in 1816, a catastrophic event occurred that caused famine in Mistelbach – and worldwide devastation.

Following is an article (loosely translated) by Rüdiger Bauriedel published in the *Hummelgauer Heimate Bote*, a local history magazine of the Mistelbach region, from June 2017:

As soon as the villagers had begun to breathe after suffering from years of the Napoleonic Wars, behold, the year 1816 brought new horrors. It all began with the eruption of the Tambora volcano on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa, which already in April 1815 spewed some 150 cubic kilometers of dust and ash, and around 130 megatons of sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere. There, these pollutants were distributed and lay like a gigantic veil around the world’s northern hemisphere. This made it impossible for the sun to reach the earth; frost, cold, snow, and ice storms, destroyed the harvests. This volcanic winter lasted from about April to September 1816. This cooling of the entire world by the volcanic eruption continued until 1819.

The unusually cold year of 1816 is called “the year without summer.” In the USA it got the nickname “eighteen hundred and frozen to death” and in Germany it became notorious as the miserable year *Achtzehnhundertunderfrozen*, or “eighteen hundred and frozen.”



Michel Ney, 1st Duke of Elchingen (1769 – 1815), was a French military commander under Napoleon whose army occupied Mistelbach – and the Dollhopf house – on October 7, 1806. The soldiers were on their way to the Battle of Jena, where one week later, on October 14, they defeated the Prussian army. With the defeat of Prussia Catharina and Johann then became citizens of France. Under French occupation, French soldiers would periodically encamp in Mistelbach over the next nine years.

The consequences were extreme: In the USA, in July and August, frost appeared during the night; in Quebec, Canada, snow fell in the middle of summer as in Switzerland. In Western Europe, there were severe thunderstorms with floods. The permanently bad weather caused catastrophic crop failures, the price of grain rose, and hunger broke out everywhere.



The deep volcanic crater, top, was produced by the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia in April 1815 - the most powerful volcanic blast in recorded history. Credit: New York Times, Iwan Setiyawan/KOMPAS, via Associated Press. The ensuing agricultural collapse and global pandemic killed an estimated 10 million people.

Father Hübsch [pastor of the church in the neighboring village of Gesees] writes about Gesees and the neighboring region:

The great masses of snow in the winter of 1816 lasted until the end of March but the rain, which fell continuously with few interruptions and with such severity that it flooded the fields and meadows, completely destroyed the grain as well as the seeds.

The schoolmaster of the nearby village of Buchau, Simon Meyer, wrote the following in his school chronicle:

The 1816th year was one of the strangest ever for humanity that you could have experienced. It was a year of wiped-out crops, caused by the rain that began in May and lasted until the end of November, which put the beautiful fruits of the fields in deep water. The Main River [the Mistel flows into the Main] resembled the Rhine River in size for 13 weeks..."

From the Chronicle:

1817: Hunger and Famine. This natural event led us to a great inflation in the year 1817, which was so oppressive that people had to eat grass and herbs and bran two or three times a day in order to escape starvation.

For Gesees, Rev. Hübsch writes: "And the worst thing was that one could not find food even if they had the money to buy it, and if they could the fruit was not ripe, and its substance was lost. Even some wealthy people shouted, "What are we going to eat? ... and instead ate grass to satisfy their hunger."

About the meager bread they were forced to eat, teacher Meyer reports:

The scarce bread consisted of little bits of corn, potatoes, rutabagas, bran, and the like. In several places Icelandic moss was collected and ground into flour. Many fathers were plagued day and night by sorrow and food worries, and by selling or pawning their household items or land – they fell into complete poverty. Inflation increased daily and shameful price gouging and unscrupulous lending practices spread...."¹⁷

As if the hunger and famine caused by the volcano in 1816 were not enough, the villagers, trying to recover in 1817, again suffered from the weather: "On the 8th of July, a terrible tempest raged over our region. The hay was swept away, cornfields razed, bogged, roofs damaged, fruit trees uprooted, forests devastated."¹⁸

These years likely represented a nadir in the lives of our ancestors, exceeded in devastation and tragedy only by the years during and after the Thirty Years War, nearly 200 years previous. Throughout the 1700s and 1800s conditions continually worsened, not only because of the weather, but also because of war and oppressive government.

How bad was it? Beginning with the mercenaries who stayed behind in America after the Revolutionary War, and continuing for roughly the next 100 years, *millions* of German peasants fled to America – *seven and half million* between 1820 and 1870.

In those years Mistelbach lost half its population.

There is evidence to suggest that Johann and Catharina were tired if not broken. Perhaps they were beaten by poverty, or crop failures, or maybe the final straw was the occupation by French troops. For whatever reason, they transferred ownership of the house and farm to their son Eberhard, our 3rd great-grandfather, in 1808 when he was only 19 years of age, the age of majority in Mistelbach. This was *highly* unusual for two reasons.

First, properties, or fiefs, normally changed hands only after the death of the owner, and Johann and Catharina were only in their mid-fifties. Not young, but not old either. Second, most sons who inherited the family farm were married with families. Never in the history of the Dollhopfs did an unmarried adult male – much less in this instance a teenager(!) – inherit the family farm.

Something else was going on in the family. In 1808 Mistelbach was still under French military rule. Perhaps they wanted to transfer the property to Eberhard out of fear of an uncertain future. Maybe Johann was incapacitated, or just worn out. We're unlikely to solve this anomaly.

Johann and Catharina were not finished facing the wrath of an angry God – it's not hard to imagine that this is what they believed as superstitious and religious peasants. In 1822 when Johann was 70, and Catharina 68, their house burned down!

On August 21, 1822, between 11 and 12 o'clock noon, a fire broke out in house #13 due to the igniting of lard. The resulting conflagration consumed 57 buildings, of which 14 residential buildings (houses number 7 to 19, 28, 30, and 31), 16 barns, and 27 outbuildings. 11 head of cattle, and five pigs, have been done in by the raging fire devastation.

¹⁷ Rüdiger Bauriedel, Hummelgauer Heimat Bote, Number 116, June 2017, pp. 14-16.

¹⁸ Mistelbach Chronicle.

87 people were suddenly left helpless and robbed of all furnishings and food supplies for man and beast. The city magistrate and many noble humanitarians of the Royal District of Bayreuth brought carts loaded with grain, bread, meat, along with money...other towns brought seed grain, hay, and straw for the cattle.

With tears in his eyes Mistelbach Mayor Adam Weydenhammer thanked the beneficent philanthropists and wished them greater returns."¹⁹

House #13 was owned at the time by Johann Schramm. As the story goes, Frau Schramm (I assume) was making *küchla*, a type of deep-fried pastry, and the lard caught fire. Ironically for us, *küchla* was probably – as we have documented many times in these blogs – a type of “Dollhopf.”²⁰ (See *Blog #15: Dollhopf Name Update.*)

The Dollhopf house was done in by a Dollhopf!

After such a difficult life, it is hard to imagine suffering the ultimate indignity of losing their house.

Disastrous village fires were a common occurrence in this part of Germany in the early 1800s. The following is a description of a village not far from Mistelbach, from an 1843 travelogue:

Wunsiedel, a small town of 5,500 inhabitants on the Rosläu (river), the greater part of which was burnt down to the ground, in 1833-4, is now rebuilt with many improvements. The frequency of such great conflagrations in this quarter of Germany, by which, not individual buildings alone, but the whole or the greater part of considerable towns and villages are consumed, is quite appalling: rarely a year passes without such a calamity.²¹

Catharina did not survive long after the fire. She died only six months later on February 19, 1823. From the church book:

Anna Catharina Dollhopf, wife of Johann Dollhopf, local farmer and inhabitant, died of cough and narrow chest [probably pneumonia] at house #55 on February 19, at 8 o'clock in the morning, and was buried with a sermon on February 21, aged 69 years, 1 month. Donated 30 kreuze [contribution to the church for the funeral].

This note in the church book provides an interesting clue to their whereabouts after their house burned down. House #55, where she died, was not her house; it was the house of her nephew, also named Johann Dollhopf (he inherited the house from his father Albrecht, Catharina's brother-in-law, who died many years earlier in 1795 at the age of 33). If the church book is correct, and there is no reason to believe that it is not, this means that after the fire Johann and Catharina were taken in by their nephew Johann and his wife Margaretha Reuschel.

The “new” house #19 was completed later in 1823.

She would not live to see the completion of her new house, the house that still stands today.

In the meantime, a world away, a small town of about 5,000 people became an incorporated city on March 18, 1816. Located on the former site of a Lenape Delaware indigenous village, at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers, this small town was officially recognized as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.²²

¹⁹ Königlich Bayerisches privilegiertes Intelligenz-Blatt für den Ober-Mainkreis: 1822.

²⁰ Reported to me by Carola Nützel in 2020.

²¹ “A Handbook for Travellers in Southern Germany” John Murray, Albemarle Street; A.&W. Gakugnanin & Co., 1843.

²² <https://www.pittsburghmagazine.com/the-official-birth-of-pittsburgh/>

Margaretha's great-grandson, whom she never lived to see, settled here 50 years later.

Next in the series on Dollhopf women: 3rd Great-grandmother Margaretha Graisinger

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New Haven, CT
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