



Dollhopf

600 Years in the Baking

What Did Our Ancestors Eat?

A Grocery List from 1808

What was on your grocery list this week?

If it was like mine, most of it was in jars, cans, bottles, plastic wrap, or cardboard – all highly processed, like breads, cereals, and pasta; or precooked like soups, sauces, dressings, and condiments; or even fully prepared meals.

If you bought fresh vegetables or fruit, you could choose from more than 250 varieties in a typical big chain grocery store.

If you bought meat, you chose from a dizzying array of cuts of cow, pig, lamb, chicken, turkey, duck, maybe goose, goat or rabbit, and a nearly endless variety of fish – *any time of year*.

And dairy...how many varieties of cheese and yogurt are there?!

The typical chain grocery store stocks *32,000* distinct products, and we spend an average of 3.36 hours per week browsing the aisles.¹

It wasn't exactly like that for our ancestors in Mistelbach.

First of all, there wasn't a grocery store. You didn't "go shopping," at least not until the 20th century. There wasn't a nearby food processing plant or factory. No butcher, baker, (or for that matter, candlestick maker). No dairy, no delicatessen, no liquor store, no fish market.²

There *might* have been a "farmer's market," but trade between peasant families in a tiny remote village such as Mistelbach would have been far less formal. You knew which neighbor was going to slaughter a pig, and you offered to buy some of it. Or which neighbor had an excess of apples. The nearest market town, with a central square for commerce, was Bayreuth, only four miles away. But as late as the 1850s our ancestors did not own a horse. I bet they didn't walk four miles and return with armfuls of "groceries." Maybe they drove a wagon with their oxen, but this was likely rare.

You get the point. If you wanted bread, you made it from scratch. And I mean *scratch* – wheat that *you* had to cut in the field. Ditto all grain, fruit, and vegetables. If you wanted meat, you went to the stable and grabbed a pig – but only if times were good and there were animals available for slaughter.



If medieval Dollhopfs walked into a modern grocery store, they would fall to their knees and offer thanks to the Almighty for deliverance.

¹ The Secret Life of Groceries: The Dark Miracle of the American Supermarket, by Benjamin Lorr; New York Times, Sunday, September 13, 2020

² To be sure there were butchers, bakers, brewers, et al., in the Middle Ages, but there were no shops or storefronts in a small village like Mistelbach.

And you could only make things from scratch *if you had scratch*. Crop failures were common because of weather disasters, disease, insects, and foraging animals. It was far too expensive to import grain, or any foodstuffs, from other villages because the cost of transportation was prohibitive. On average, devastating crop failures and ensuing famines occurred every 15 to 20 years, so our Dollhopf ancestors were likely to experience two or three in their lifetimes.

Meat, of any sort, was a luxury. Animals were few, and costly to maintain. If you killed a cow or chicken, you eliminated the source of your milk, butter, cheese, or eggs. You made the calculation: meat or milk. Pigs were the exception and perhaps the most commonly eaten meat. [See Appendix B: *Schlachtschüssel* for a description of the traditional Franconian pork meal.]

Estimates vary widely, but medieval peasants consumed about 30 pounds of meat per year (about 2½ pounds of meat per month, or a little over one ounce a day). This of course, was an average; some weeks there would be plenty, others not. The church books of Mistelbach report that there were often *years* when the village went without any meat.

So what did our Mistelbach grandmothers and grandfathers eat?

Because of an unusual land transfer between Dollhopf father and son in 1808, we know.

In 1808, Johann and Catharina Dollhopf, our 4th great-grandparents, sold the family farm to their youngest son Eberhard, who was only 19 at the time and unmarried.

This was a *highly* unusual occurrence, even in those times. A farmer usually retained ownership of his farm until he died, and only then the *fief* (the medieval right to rent a farm) transferred to his wife and children. Johann was only 56 at the time; his wife Catharina, 54.

In 1800s Mistelbach there were no retirement or assisted living facilities. One didn't go to the south of Germany and enjoy a life of leisure in an adults-only active lifestyle community. You died in the house in which you were born, unless you married and moved away.

When they transferred the farm to their teenage son they wanted to ensure that they would have a place to live until they died, and, interestingly enough, that their food needs would be met. So, they drafted a contract that stipulated not only the terms of the property to be transferred, but also the amount and type of foodstuffs they would need each year.

A grocery list, if you will, for the rest of their lives.



Cottage with Peasant Woman Digging by Vincent Van Gogh. Painted in the 1800s this is perhaps a realistic image of the Dollhopf house in 1808. We have no contemporary photos or sketches of Johann Dollhopf's house, but it was likely half-timbered with brick or stucco, and a roof of thatch, as was common. House #19 as it appears today was built by Eberhard Dollhopf in 1823 of locally quarried sandstone and had a tiled roof, after the great fire of 1822 destroyed many Mistelbach houses.

Difficult Times

First, some context. Why were they compelled to transfer the property so soon to their teenage son Eberhard?

After the Thirty Years War, which ended in 1648, the economies of peasant villages, especially in this region of Germany, continued to suffer, leading to widespread collapse in the mid nineteenth century. This was due to many reasons, including the immediate population loss caused by that war (up to 40% to 60% in some rural areas, including Mistelbach), crop destruction, famine, continuing wars, plagues, oppressive taxes, hyperinflation, and lack of central government safeguards. By the late 1700s Mistelbach had fallen on particularly hard times, which lasted throughout most of the 1800s. As covered in previous blogs, conditions became so bad in the mid 1800s that a mass emigration to America occurred. During that time the Mistelbach region *again* lost more than a third of its population.

Farmers were increasingly unable to sustain themselves because their farms were too small and fragile. They were at the mercy of the climate, the economy, and the whims of the nobility. The statistics in Franconia were likely as bleak as they were in the neighboring principality of Saxony: in 1550, roughly 50% of all peasant farms could support a family, by 1750 this had fallen to 25%, and by 1843 only 14% of peasant farms were sustainable."³



Two Peasant Women in the Peat Fields by Vincent Van Gogh. Van Gogh captured the bleakness of peasant life in this painting.

Evidence of these difficult times is Eberhard's family. At the age of 35, he married Margarethe Graisinger, a weaver's daughter from Glashütten, a village 4 miles from Mistelbach. She was 22, thirteen years younger, when they married on October 3, 1824. It was unusual for a man to wait until his mid 30s to marry, a symptom of the times – because of food scarcity and overpopulation, governments were imposing regulations that made marriage

³ Sagarra, Eda. *A Social History of Germany, 1648-1914* (p. 153). Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition.

difficult in the lower social classes. Out-of-wedlock births had been increasing since the mid 1700s; Eberhard and Margarethe had one illegitimate child, Catharina Margaretha, at the time they were married. Although officially “immoral,” there was increasingly little shame attached to this practice because it was so common.⁴

Intense political turmoil roiled the villages. Eberhard was a citizen of four countries in his lifetime, yet he never moved from house #19. At the time he was born, Mistelbach was a village in the margraviate of Ansbach-Bayreuth. When he was two, the Margrave at the time, Carl Alexander, sold Ansbach-Bayreuth to Prussia, so Eberhard became Prussian. When he was 17 Napoleon conquered Prussia, so he became a citizen of France. Four years later, in 1810, Napoleon sold the Mistelbach territory to King Maximilian of Bavaria; then he was Bavarian.⁵

Bayreuther, Prussian, French, Bavarian, all in a lifetime of only 54 years.

Famine and disease took its toll. Margarethe and Eberhard had ten children in a span of 18 years between 1824 and 1842; Margarethe was pregnant every other year. Sadly, only five of their children lived to adulthood, only two beyond the age of 30. Their last four children were born between 1834 and 1842, a time of extreme poverty and food scarcity. All four died as infants: Anna Catharina died at 14 months, Barbara at 24 months, Pankratius at 20 months, and Conrad at 13 months. Margarethe’s babies were dying faster than she could birth them.

Their last baby, Conrad, died on May 18, 1843; Eberhard died only six months later, perhaps of a broken heart.⁶ Margarethe was left a widow at age 41, having just lost three babies in two years, and had five other children at home. She never remarried, ran the farm on her own, and outlived all but two of her children. She died in 1863 at the age of 61. A tragic but heroic life; imagine the grief and pain she endured.

She did live to see her grandchild, our great-grandfather John Dollhopf, who was 11 at the time of her death. They lived in the same house, #19, until Johann moved to a neighboring village when he was seven.⁷

Eberhard’s parents – Johann and Catharina – didn’t have it easy either. They had six children, of whom Eberhard was the youngest, 15 years younger than his oldest brother, Stephan. Of their six offspring, two died as young children – Johann, who died on July 26, 1784 at the age of 27 days, and a second Johann, who died four weeks later at age four on August 15th. She lost two babies within three weeks of each other. No cause of death was indicated for the babies in the church book, although many of the deaths at the time were due to dysentery, typhoid (called “nervous fever” then), and pneumonia – all symptoms of extreme poverty.

The Immediate Years Leading Up to 1808

There were several specific and seriously debilitating events leading up to the transfer of the farm in 1808.

In 1802, as reported in the *Mistelbach Chronicle*:⁸

⁴ Eberhard’s son Johann would have four out-of-wedlock children before he married, the oldest was our great-grandfather, John Dollhopf.

⁵ Bayreuth, Prussia, and Bavaria were sovereign principalities. Germany, as a nation, did not exist until 1871.

⁶ Eberhard died of “nervous pneumonia,” today known as mycoplasma pneumonia, or “walking pneumonia,” common in crowded and impoverished conditions, easily spread by coughing and sneezing.

⁷ When Margarethe’s son Johann died in 1858, her daughter-in-law, also named Margarethe, remarried and moved with her four children, including John Dollhopf to the neighboring village of Oberwaiz when was seven.

⁸ *Mistelbach: die Chronik eines Hummelgaurfes* (Mistelbach: the Chronicle of a Hummelgau Village) by Stephan Hartnagel, March, 2003. [The Hummelgau is the hilly, largely agricultural, region between the Red Main valley and Franconian Switzerland. The scenic area has many distinct traditions and customs.]

1802: Abnormal weather conditions destroyed almost the entire harvest in this year, and all hopes of a pleasant time 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.

When crops were destroyed, as they were in 1802, famine ensued, at least for the year following. Food could not be bought from neighboring territories because of the high cost of transportation, and another growing cycle was necessary to restore grain supplies – not only for humans, but also for livestock. The inundation by mice likely led to the ruin of stored grain.



Van Gogh's *Peasant Woman in Front of a Farmhouse* is an all too realistic depiction of an impoverished peasant house. Before the 1800s peasant houses were not built to last; they often needed major repairs, or total replacement, every other generation. Note the thatched roof and attached stable, both prone to fire. Given the intense poverty of Mistelbach in 1808, this was likely the state of most of the houses. This painting is famous because it was purchased in a London junk shop in 1968 for £45, and recently sold for £15 million.

If they did recover in the following year of 1803 – a big “if” – they were hit again by bad weather in 1804, and as the Chronicle reported, there were other complications:

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 bread. In addition, there was a poor harvest in the autumn.

In this year the harvest was again unfavorable. Persistent rainy weather and the caterpillar of the *Kohlweissling*,⁹ 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. The local government (courts) therefore recommended the production of potato bread in general,

⁹ *Kohlweissling* (Latin: *Pieris Rapae*) is known as the “Small White” butterfly in Europe, and the “Cabbage” butterfly in North America. The caterpillar causes extensive damage to *brassicaceae* crops such as cabbage, kale, broccoli, cauliflower, turnips, rapeseed (common in Germany as a source of oil, which we call canola), radish, and horseradish – all basic, mainstay, vegetable crops in Mistelbach.

and set premium prices for the production of flour, semolina, or groats from potatoes in larger quantities, and at the same time prohibited the export of these.

Even in following years, crop failures and price increases continued to occur. Thus, the potato often became the "savior in time of need." This fruit was introduced in Upper Franconia in 1654, but for a long time it was only used as animal feed. Only around 1750 it was discovered in the Bayreuther Land as human food.

The Dollhopf farm was most probably under extreme stress. Living in the house at the time of these crop failures were Johann (age 53) and Catharina (51), and two of their children, Johann (18) and Eberhard (15). Their oldest son Stephan married in 1796 and moved to the Schnörleinsmühle with his in-laws.¹⁰ Their only daughter Kunigunde died the year before, in 1803, of typhoid, unmarried at the age of 26. As mentioned above, their two other boys died as infants.

Not having any crops meant they were not only lacking food, but also income. Johann did not practice a trade to supplement his farming; all that he earned, if anything, came from his crops. The farm, including fields, meadows, and woods, was about 29 acres at the time, which was substantial, but still not classified as a "whole" farm for tax purposes. It was still a "peasant" farm, with arable land barely above that necessary for subsistence.

Food was a problem. So was war and political unrest of a very personal nature.

Napoleon was busy invading Europe, fighting a succession of wars beginning in 1803 that did not end until 1815. The specific period of time from 1806-1807 was the War of the Fourth Coalition.¹¹ In that war Napoleon defeated the Prussians on October 14, 1806 at the Battle of Jena-Auerstadt, a village only 90 miles north of Mistelbach.

Here is why it was personal for the Dollhopf family: Napoleon's army, on the march to that battle, encamped in Mistelbach, occupying nearly every house. From the Chronicle:

October 7, 1806: French troops from Marshal Ney's¹² corps advanced into our territory; 320 men were quartered in Mistelbach; but they did not cause any damage. There were 4 officers and 5 soldiers in the parsonage. Such accommodations were repeated until 1815 [my underline].



Marshal Michel Ney (1769-1815), First Duke of Elchingen, First Prince of the Moskva, was a marshal – general – in Napoleons army. He occupied Mistelbach in October of 1806.

¹⁰ Stephan's grandnephew John Dollhopf was born in the Schnörleinsmühle ("flour mill") 56 years later in 1852.

¹¹ The War of the Fourth Coalition was between Napoleon (French Empire) and the Fourth Coalition allies – Prussia, Russia, Saxony, Sweden, and England.

¹² Marshal Michel Ney, the First Duke of Elchingen, was a French military commander, one of the 18 original Marshals of the Empire appointed by Napoleon.

Imagine a knock on your door (if the troops were even that polite, as they probably just knocked the door down), and there before you, standing in the square, immediately in front of the Dollhopf house, were 320 French troops. Imagine today if 300 Russian or Chinese troops appeared in your front yard.

At the time there were only 50 to 60 houses in the village. The officers were quartered in the parsonage across the street from the Dollhopf house. There were likely at least five to ten soldiers “staying” at the Dollhopfs, which then only had three or four rooms. Thankfully they did not cause any damage, but they were enemy troops after all, and when troops quartered in a village, they took whatever food and loot they could. They no doubt “supplied” themselves for the upcoming 90-mile march to the battle at Jena.

This is even more atrocious considering that these “home invasions” in Mistelbach continued on and off *for the next ten years*.

Against such a backdrop, it is not difficult to understand why Johann wanted to transfer the property to his son Eberhard sooner rather than later. For him, and his family, there might not be a “later.” Life was extremely precarious and uncertain.

The transfer to Eberhard was completed on May 18, 1808. Johann almost certainly would have done this sooner, but he had to wait until Eberhard came of legal age, which was 19 in Mistelbach. It is not clear to me why the property was not transferred, in whole or part, to Eberhard’s brother Johann, who was four years older. Perhaps Johann was disabled, incapable, or just didn’t want it. Or maybe Dad liked Eberhard best. We will never know.

The *Contract for the Transfer of Land* is in Appendix A. This contract was signed and first entered into court records on April 13, 1808. The land was to be transferred to Eberhard at a cost of 50 guilders – which they considered to be his inheritance given to him in advance, so no money actually changed hands. In other words, they were bequeathing him 60 guilders, which he in turn used to “buy” the farm.

But Johann and Eberhard did not have a witness to officially recognize the signing on that day, so they needed to reappear at the court a month later on May 16, this time with a witness. That witness would be village innkeeper Peter Potzler.

In the intervening month between signings the contract was curiously amended. The new document included the “grocery list,” and even more interesting, the price of the transfer increased from 50 guilders to 250 guilders!

Whew. During those four weeks there must have been some interesting “discussions” in the Dollhopf household; they probably went something like... “Look son, if I give you this farm, I want a guarantee that your mother and I can live here until we die, and you’ll have to feed us too. Here’s the list of what we’ll need....and uh, oh yeah, we’ve also decided to raise the price!”

The contract signing was delayed yet another two days, until May 18, because they forgot to include Catharina, Johann’s wife, who was co-owner of the farm! Seemed she wanted some say too.

The following page is a transcript of the contract from the court in Bayreuth. It includes the grocery list:

Johann Dollhopf Bayreuth, 18 May 1808
 Contract of transfer
 Staatsarchiv, D-96047 Bamberg:
 Amtsgericht Bayreuth, Verträge, "D", 2/1808.

Originally the date for making the contract of transfer was set for May 16, however, it had to be postponed by two days because originally it had been forgotten to summon Eberhard's trustee and Johann Dollhopf's wife, who was relevant as a co-owner of the property.

For making this contract appeared at the Office of Justice in Bayreuth on May 18:

1. The subject Johann Dollhopf;
2. His wife Catharina;
3. Eberhard Dollhopf, still underage;
4. His trustee, Innkeeper Pozel; all from Mistelbach.

Johann Dollhopf transferred to Eberhard his peasant farm, located opposite the church, with an orchard, in the size of 1/8 tagwerk ["acre"], and a field in the size of 2 tagwerk located in the Warmsreuth district, for 250 guilders.¹³ This amount shall be considered an advance to the inheritance [this meant that no actual money changed hands]. In addition to the usual legal formalities the contract includes the following particular determinations:

The transfer shall be effective from Candlemas 1808.¹⁴

The son commits himself to provide his parents with the following annual amounts:

1. 6 mass of wheat [about six bushels, see note]¹⁵
2. 8 mass of rye
3. 8 mass of potatoes
4. 1½ *schock* of cabbage [a *schock* was 60 of something, so 90 heads of cabbage]
5. 4 mass of barley
6. One third of the fruit from the garden ["fruit" translates to fruit *and* vegetables]
7. 12 mass of lard [rendered pig fat, probably about 12 pounds]¹⁶
8. Daily 1 mass of milk, provided there are milk cows on the farm¹⁷
9. 2 *schock* of eggs and every week a quarter pound of butter [120 eggs for the year]
10. 4 *guilders* for meat¹⁸
11. 5 *ells*¹⁹ of flax cloth, 5 *ells* of hemp cloth, besides wood, light, and free accommodation in the house.

The property is free of debts.

¹³ When Eberhard died in 1843 the farm consisted of 29 acres. This contract only stipulates a transfer of two acres. I can't account for the difference, unless it was included in the original contract, or perhaps Eberhard purchased another 27 acres in his lifetime, a possibility because many farms were abandoned as families left for America.

¹⁴ Candlemas, a religious holiday, is the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, 40 days after Christmas on February 2.

¹⁵ A mass (German *maße, messen, or messei*), was a generic, ancient term of measurement. As you will note, they used it to define grains, milk, lard, potatoes, etc. The size of a "mass" differed from village to village, and according to what was being measured, it was probably like saying, "I'll give you five 'bunches' of that." For grain it was estimated at about 30 liters in volume, or something slightly less than one bushel.

¹⁶ This would be about half a pig's worth. An average pig produces about 24 pounds of lard.

¹⁷ Not quite sure what a mass of milk was. Milk was not considered a drink, it was "eaten," so it was considered a solid. Since the above allocation was daily for two people (remember, you couldn't store milk) it was probably about two quarts at most. They probably used it for porridge or cheese rather than drinking it.

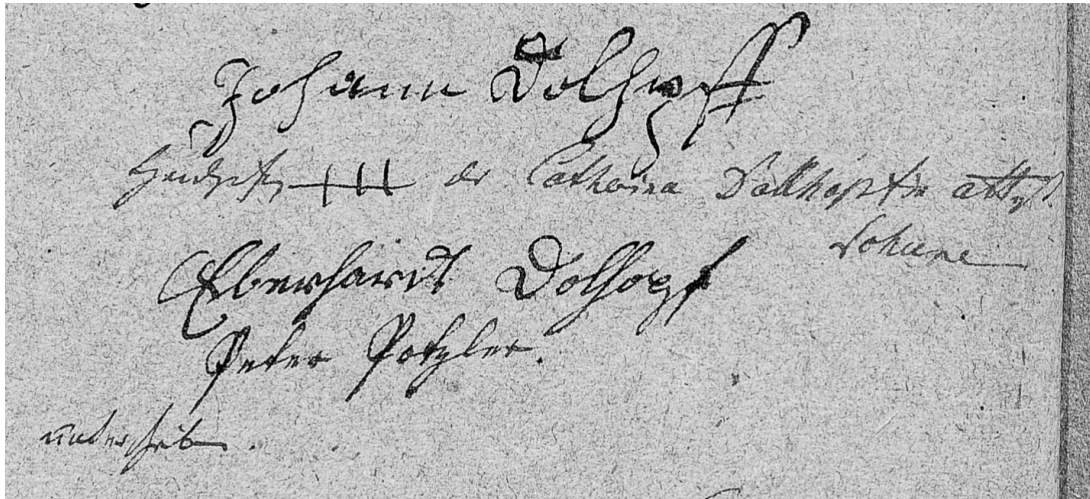
¹⁸ A schoolteacher earned 60 guilders/year, so 4 guilders equaled about 3 weeks wages. This was a huge sum.

¹⁹ An *ell*, or *elle*, was a unit of length determined by the distance from the tip of the middle finger to the "el"bow, or something less than a yard. In northern Germany it equaled about 2 feet, in Prussia 2½ feet, in southern Germany often 2½ feet. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obsolete_German_units_of_measurement#Elle_\(ell\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obsolete_German_units_of_measurement#Elle_(ell))

The transferor remarked that he purchased this property from his father-in-law, the deceased Stephan Hagen from Mistelbach, in the year of 1784.²⁰

The contract is signed as follows:

Johann Dolhopff
 Personal mark “+++” of Catharina Dollhopf
 Eberhardt Dolhopf
 Peter Potzler



The signatures on the Contract of Transfer in 1808 tell their own story. Above is a close up of the signatures; they are written in *Kurrentschrift*, an old form of German handwriting based on late Middle Ages cursive script. The four signatures are:

Johann Dolhopff
 +++ the personal mark of Catharina Dollhopf
 Eberhardt Dolhopf
 Peter Potzler

Johann spelled his name with one “l” and two “f”s. Catharina, whose full name was Anna Catharina, just wrote “+++”, demonstrating that she could not read or write. You will note that the court official, who indicated that this indeed was her personal mark, wrote in contemporary German script, not *Kurrentschrift*. He was likely better educated than the peasant family standing before him, who still wrote in the ancient style, if they wrote at all.

Eberhardt, who was 19, spelled his first name with a “t” at the end, which is different from other records. Weirdly, at least to me, he spelled Dolhopf with one “f”, different from his father. They were both signing at the same time; you’d think they would notice that they were spelling their surname differently. It is also interesting that Eberhardt could write, but his mother could not.

Peter Potzler (the odd looking “P”s are *Kurrentschrift*), the innkeeper, lived in house #31. It is located across the street from the old Mistelbach castle, five houses away from Dollhopf house #19. Today the first floor is a restaurant, so it is entirely possible that the house was an inn in the 1800s.

Following is a picture of the page from the court records with the “grocery list” enumerated on the bottom left of the page:

²⁰ Stephan Hagen, his father-in-law, had already died, so he actually purchased it from Stephan’s widow.

Nota. Wenn ein Ausgebirg mit bedungen, so wird dieser im Allgemeinen mit Beziehung auf das beizufügende Verzeichniß bemerkt.

Joseph Anton Anton Anton Anton
in dem Hypotheken-Buch des Amtes

Vol. Nro. eingetragene

gut und ist ein Gutrecht gegeben
Die Lehnen sind und waren die
gewissen mit der Anzahl
worauf an Lasten haften zu

für den Betrag
Mar. 1808
für die Namme

ausgeführt am 2. d. 20. 1808
Inhalts und in allem
Mar. 1808, sollen sich
auf die 16. Seite in dem
C. 16. und 17. 1808

für die Summe von

Zwei hundert und fünfzig Gulden
H. Dreyer muß leisten

- 1. 6. Maß Mehl
- 2. 8. Maß Korn
- 3. 8. Maß Weizen
- 4. 1/2. Maß Weizen
- 5. Vier Maß Weizen
- 6. Ein Maß von Obst von Gärten
- 7. 12. Maß Mehl
- 8. 1/2. Maß Mehl, mit
unverändertem Mehl
- 9. Ein Maß Mehl und alle
andere für Viertel Mehl
- 10. Vier Gulden 16. in Mehl
- 11. 10. Maß Mehl, 5. Maß Mehl
Mehl, 5. Maß Mehl
bei welcher Umständen
Abgabe zu geben mit.

In Ansehung der Uebergabe und der
bis zur Zeit der Uebergabe von dem Lehnen
kommenden Nutzungen und davon zu
leistenden Abgaben habe ich die Kontra-
henten verabredet.

daß die Uebergabe schon zu
meiner Zeit
von Seiten des Lehnen
sich, daß es von
meiner Seite
und alle
Abgabe
mit
Abgabe
mit

Abgabe
mit
Abgabe
mit
Abgabe
mit
Abgabe
mit

This list was most generous. I think Mom and Dad got the best of Junior. This ample amount of food would be possible in times of plentiful harvests, but not so much during famines or otherwise lean years. Mom and Dad wanted to go for the maximum.

I'm also not sure how they would have kept track of the actual amounts consumed throughout the course of the year since they were all living under one roof. Catharina was doing the cooking for everyone since she was the only woman in the house until Eberhard married in 1824. Catharina died the year before in 1823, the year her second grandchild was born, the first child of Eberhard and Margarethe. Johann died five years later in 1828; by that time there were four grandchildren running around the house.

How did they use this grocery list?

- 18 bushels of wheat, rye, and barley were certainly used for *brot* ("bread"), but most often for *brei* ("porridge").²¹ *Brei* is a thick stew of boiled grain flavored with lard or butter, bits of meat if available, probably potatoes, and herbs, vegetables, and fruit from the garden.

Porridge was the bulk of their diet, often served for all three meals. An annual reserve of 18 bushels would likely equal about 2 to 3½ cups of grain per person, per day, for two people, Catharina and Johann. One loaf of bread was probably four to six cups. (Bread was likely eaten at every meal with the porridge.) The contents of the porridge would be dictated by what was seasonally available, but I'm sure Catharina had her own special recipe. Wish I knew what that was.

- 8 bushels of potatoes – until the mid 1700s potatoes were considered animal food, but as a result of famine they were discovered to be valuable human food, a valuable addition to porridge. 8 small bushels was about 240 to 300 lbs of potatoes, or about one potato per person per day. In the early 1800's, because of the grain shortage, potatoes were also used for bread, and as previously noted, was a substitute for grains when they were not available.
- 90 heads of cabbage were (of course) used for sauerkraut, and probably added to the porridge as well. We know from an inventory in 1858 that the house had a sauerkraut vat. A head of cabbage produces about a quart of sauerkraut, so if the 90 heads were used only for sauerkraut, which they probably were not, it would equal about 1½ quarts of sauerkraut per week for two people. They would only be able to make sauerkraut if they could afford salt, whose price fluctuated wildly.
- It's hard to estimate what a third of the garden "fruit" would include, and how much. (Fruit here means both fruit and vegetables.) In addition to cabbage, the garden likely included turnips, onions, mustard greens, kale, carrots, leeks, celery, cucumbers, broad beans, chard, and herbs of many and various types (herbs were used most often for "medicine"). As for actual fruit – apples, pears, plums, and cherries were common. To this day Franconia specializes in apple, pear, and cherry *schnapps*.
- 120 eggs per year equals about one egg for Johann and Catharina each, per week, so they certainly were not plentiful.
- Milk, as noted, would be available only if there were cows present, which was infrequent. Cows had to be fed enormous amounts of hay, and in times of drought or famine this was difficult. If food was scarce, a cow would be killed in late autumn so they would not have to feed it through the winter months.
It is interesting that cheese, a staple, is not on this list. It might have been understood that the milk would be used for cheese. Peasants did not often drink milk; they drank the whey – the watery substance that remains after separating the curds used for cheese. (Whey tastes awful.) Milk was also used for porridge.
- 4 guilders for meat was a lot of money, but all for naught if meat wasn't available. When it was, they ate every part of the animal, head to tail, internal organs and all, because it was so precious.

²¹ Porridge is any sort of boiled grains, e.g., oatmeal is porridge, Cream of Wheat is porridge. In medieval literature one will also see the term *pottage*, the root of which is pot, literally "meal in a pot."

The peasants added salt and herbs to the ground-up animal parts, stuffed the mixture into the cleaned animal's intestines, and then dried or smoked it. This, of course, is sausage.

- 5 ells of flax cloth and 5 ells of hemp cloth would have been used for clothing, linens, and bedding, as coarse as it was. There is no mention of wool. Ten yards of cloth is not a lot. Peasants typically had only one set of clothes. They didn't replace blouses, pants, or skirts often. They were continually patched until they wore out.
- And of course, wood, light, and free accommodation in the house. But they were all living together anyway!

There you have it: this was Johann and Catharina's retirement fund. All they needed was a place to stay, wood for warmth and light, and something to eat. Catharina lived another 15 years, Johann, 20.

This two-hundred-year-old grocery list gives us rare insight into our peasant ancestors' diet, which was mostly porridge and bread.

Many recipes for medieval porridge can be found online. I have found most to be finicky and overly romanticized with the inclusion of many different liquids and spices – a ¼ cup of this, a teaspoon of that, a ½ tablespoon of this, a pint of that...but they didn't have measuring cups or spoons!

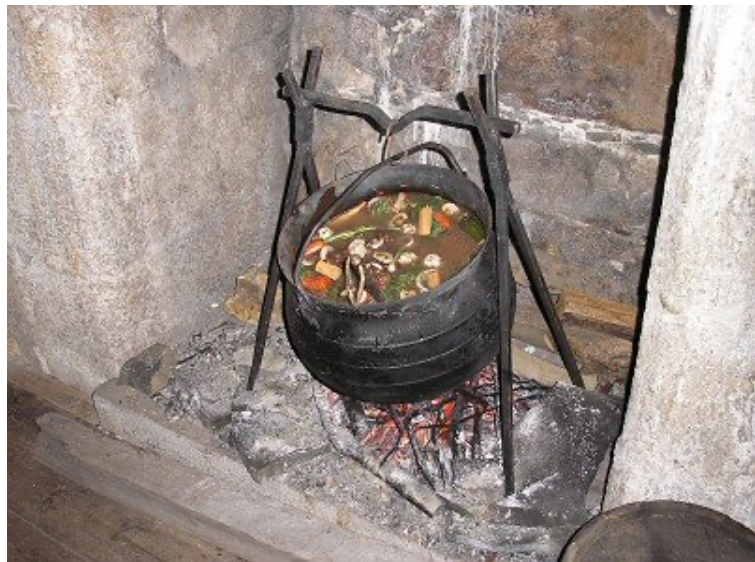
I am sure of this: for poor people who wrestled daily with scarcity, porridge included any and *all* available food stuffs, not just what was wanted for taste, but what was essential for survival. Most contemporary porridge recipes today were recipes of the aristocracy, whose diet was far more varied, and meat centered.

And the porridge had to be filling, packed full of as many calories as possible since the average peasant worked in the fields from dawn to dusk. They needed in excess of 4,000 calories daily to remain healthy, compared to less than 3,000 for the average adult today. Men worked the fields clearing land, plowing, sowing, and reaping; women generally took care of the garden and cut fresh hay daily for the animals (if there were any) – in addition to preparing the meals, cleaning the house, and taking care of the children. More on this in a later blog.

Catharina Dollhopf's Recipe for Porridge

Okay, I'm making this up, but it probably went something like this:

To begin with, she didn't have a stove, or an oven. Nor, frankly, did she have a kitchen.²² She cooked her porridge directly on a fire in the main living area beside the stable. The family did their "living" – eating, cooking, everything except sleeping – in one room. Perhaps in the summer she cooked outside. She likely used a large iron pot, or vat, that stood on three or four legs in the fire, or was suspended over the fire, chained to a



No kitchen. Catharina cooked her porridge on a fire, possibly on a hearth, in the one room living area.

²² They did own a 1/13 share in a community oven in the town square. This oven was constructed of stone or clay.

tripod or hooked on some other iron hanging device.

Obviously, she had to build and tend the fire, no small chore. Having enough wood was a constant worry and concern, especially since the nobility would not allow peasants to scavenge wood from the forest without paying heavy fees, if they were allowed at all.

She would start with some lard, perhaps butter, to soften whatever vegetables were available. These would commonly include beets, carrots, turnips, onions and potatoes – root vegetables that could be stored in the root cellar and used year-round – and seasonal vegetables such as greens, cabbages, mushrooms, squash, and other perishables. Fruit, such as apples, pears, and cherries would also be added to the porridge. (Peasants shunned raw fruit; they preferred it cooked.)

She might also sear any available meat, which would have to be that of a freshly slaughtered animal since there was no refrigeration. If meat was used, it was often the lesser cuts, although she could have used dried or smoked meat, or sausage. Meat was not the centerpiece of the meal as in the typical American or European diet of today, except perhaps on religious holidays.



Apparently, Johann helped with the porridge.

After the vegetables and meat were seared, she would add liquid, commonly water, whey, or cider; but milk, broth (if they were fortunate), or beer could be used. Whatever was available.

There was no measuring; she just filled the pot as in the photos.

She would let that cook while adding herbs and spices for flavor. Peasant gardens were full of herbs, but I do not know specifically what was in the Dollhopf garden of 1808. We do know, from the Mistelbach Chronicle, that many

gardens in Mistelbach included sweet wood, which we call anise or licorice. While this was often used for medicinal purposes to dissolve phlegm, it was also used for flavoring porridge. Other “flavors” might have been many and varied, including fruit, as mentioned above, honey, hyssop, juniper berries, dandelion, and of course...parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme. There is indeed a reason for the song.

Salt was used if available. It was expensive: members of the nobility in the Middle Ages were notorious for the salt monopoly they held over the peasants. They controlled quantities and prices. Pepper and other dear, exotic, spices could have been used, but not often by poor peasants.

To this savory olio she then added the grain – wheat, barley, or rye. Apparently, according to the grocery list, they did not have oats, the most common porridge grain with which we are familiar. Think oatmeal. Rye was the most common grain on the Dollhopf farm; you’ll note that the list included more rye than either wheat or barley.

This mixture was then cooked until thick. It was entirely possible that the porridge cooked all day, eaten when someone was hungry, after which additional foodstuffs might be thrown in – adding to the pot all day, a family “stone soup.”

If this sounds delicious, perhaps it was. But peasant porridges were known to be bland. I am certain that in times of food scarcity and insecurity many porridges were fairly tasteless mushes of water, grain, and a few root vegetables. In the Dollhopf farm inventory of 1858, taken in late January after Catharina’s grandson Johann died, the list of household foodstuffs included only beets, turnips, wheat, rye, and barley – no other vegetables, fruit, or herbs. It was winter after all, but certainly evidence of how the family ate when fresh fruit and vegetables ran out.

Meals were not seated affairs around a kitchen table. In that same inventory of 1858, there was only *one* chair in the entire house. One chair! Also, of note: the house did not have forks or table knives, only spoons. Porridge was eaten with a spoon or sopped up with bread. This might have been unusual, but they were, after all, poor.

If there was any porridge left at the end of the day, it was consumed the next. Catharina would again add to the pot in the morning, unless for some reason it was entirely consumed the previous evening, at which point she would start over. You could not store “leftovers” to be eaten at a later date. *Everything* had to be eaten as it was cooked, nothing would have been thrown out.

This, by the way, is the context for the 17th century Mother Goose English nursery rhyme:

Pease porridge hot, pease porridge cold,
Pease porridge in the pot, nine days old.
Some like it hot, some like it cold,
Some like it in the pot, nine days old.

Pease was the generic term used for all dried legumes, which included split, or yellow, peas. We know from this verse that porridge was eaten hot and cold, and that indeed some liked it nine days old – meaning that the porridge lingered in the pot for days.

Wouldn't it be great to have Catharina’s 200-year-old recipes? Alas, she didn't read or write.

Conclusion

Why did Johann and Catharina take the highly unusual step to sign over the farm to their teenage son? And why did they take the equally unusual step to seek food guarantees?

The 1800 aughts were years of great uncertainty for the Dollhopf family. Crop failures, the resulting famines, occupations by French troops, and disease took their toll. To make matters worse, these misfortunes were

compounded by the war reparations payments that Napoleon forced upon Bavaria – which, of course, found their way to the peasantry in the form of higher taxes.

Here is my thesis: Johann and Catharina were acting out of fear. Under extreme stress, and without a clear path to a certain future for themselves, they acted to secure a future for their son, and perhaps the fate of the farm. Their oldest son Stephan had left, the oldest daughter Kunigunde and two younger boys had died; still at home were the two teenage boys, Johann and Eberhard.

They waited until 1808 to make their move, when Eberhard turned 19, the age of majority. Why Eberhard got the entire farm, and not Johann, or why it was not divided among the two, we will never know.

Because of the crop failures they were experiencing debilitating “food insecurity”: the inability to consistently access or afford adequate food. In taking the curious step of adding a yearly grocery list to the contract, Johann and Catharina sought to provide themselves with food security.

That simple act gave us, their descendants, a scrapbook memory of their daily diet.

Although they probably didn’t know it, or couldn’t appreciate it, 1808 was a good year for Mistelbach – if you were a serf. After conquering Prussia, Napoleon abolished serfdom – onerous taxes, land regulations, marriage requirements, church control, lack of civil rights, et al.

Unfortunately for the serfs, including our grandparents, anti-serfdom laws were not enforced in Mistelbach for almost half a century, until the German Revolution of 1848, at which time liberal reforms swept most German principalities. Change rolled through these remote rural communities very, very, slowly.

Johann, Catharina, and their son Eberhard would not live to see the day of true freedom from serfdom.

Eberhard’s family would continue to endure the downward spiral of painful poverty – and all too frequently, death. As I described earlier, eight of his ten children died before the age of 30. These were dark times, although he gallantly fought on – he served as mayor of Mistelbach in the 1820s and early 30s, long enough to sadly observe the beginning of the mass exodus of his friends and neighbors to America.

His grandson, whom he never met, was one.

Mark R. Dollhopf
New Haven, Connecticut
September 9, 2020
In anno corona virum.

Appendix A: Transfer of Farm #19 to Son Eberhard

Bayreuth, 13 April 1808
Johann Dollhopf
Transfer of farm # 19 to son Eberhard
Staatsarchiv, D-96047 Bamberg:
Amtsgericht Bayreuth, Verträge, "D", 2/1808.

Done in the treasury in Bayreuth, April 13, 1808. There appears the subject Johann Dollhopf from Mistelbach with his youngest son Eberhard Dollhopf, 19 years old, whom he had his peasant farm, which is a fief from the treasury, transferred to today, with the following remarks.

According to the produced letter of investiture, issued by the local Feudal Court on February 4, 1799, he [the father Johann] had then received as a continuous hereditary fief a farm thereat, located opposite church and graveyard, where formerly home and barn stood, and an orchard, in the size of 1/8 tagwerk; including the field owned by Kunigunde née and married Hagen [Johann's mother-in-law], in the size of ½ tagwerk, located in the Warmsreuth district. For changing the quality of a masculine fief²³ and cancelling the case-of-death fee he pays an annual rent of 1.12 guilders to the local treasury, and in all cases of transfer, like sale, barter, inheritance, pays a transfer fee of 10 per cent. He now wanted to have this farm and orchard ceded into his son Eberhardt Dollhopf's possession, for 50 guilders, that the same may charge to the parental inheritance.²⁴ The son gratefully accepts his father's declaration and asks for the transfer of the fief.

Thus said farm and orchard located opposite the church in Mistelbach, in the size of 1/8 tagwerk, was transferred to Eberhard Dollhopf as a continuous hereditary fief, and the same informed about the particular related obligations.

The same was also instructed to pay the taxes of 60 guilders in Rhenish currency, transfer fee of 6 guilders in Rheinisch currency, and the usual charges.
Read aloud, approved and signed.

Ammon [not sure what this means....]

Johann Dollhopf
Eberhardt Dollhopf

This is a true copy of the original.
[official's signature]

The contract shall be recorded on May 16, 9 o'clock in the morning, in presence of [...] von Valderndorf, that both Dollhopfs, father and son, and the latter's trustee, innkeeper Potzler from Mistelbach, are to be summoned.

Bayreuth, April 14, 1808.
[official's signature]

For making the contract of transfer regarding his peasant farm to his youngest son Eberhard Dollhopf, which was notified to the treasury by the subject Johann Dollhopf from Mistelbach on April 13, 1808, May 16, 9 o'clock in the morning was set as a date. Both parties have to appear, otherwise another date shall be set at their costs.

Bayreuth, April 20, 1808.
[official's signature]

²³ Some fiefs were masculine; they could only be inherited by a son. They were changing this fief to a gender neutral one.

²⁴ Eberhard was getting his inheritance in advance to use to purchase the property.

Appendix B: *Schlachtschüssel*

A *schlachtschüssel* (literally a “bowl of slaughter”) is a traditional Franconian meal – an event as much as it is a meal, because slaughtering a pig didn’t happen often, perhaps once a year for a peasant family, if they were fortunate to own a pig.²⁵



A Franconian schlachtschüssel is a traditional, festive meal where all of the parts of a cooked pig are spread on the table with plenty of sauerkraut, horseradish, brown bread, and beer. The tradition continues to this day.

Typically, the pig would be slaughtered in the late fall or early winter, after the pigs had been fattened by feeding on acorns in the forests, and when the weather was cool enough so as to prevent the meat from spoiling (in the days before refrigeration). Most animals were butchered in the fall, because feeding them through the winter, especially in times of food scarcity, was difficult.



The entire pig, after being cooked in large vats, would be spread on the table for all to pick, much like a clam bake or a shrimp boil in the US. The animal was slaughtered early in the morning, and the cooking and processing of the meat was finished by evening. In those days before refrigeration the pig had to be eaten, or processed, in one sitting. All of the pig was consumed – belly meat, head meat, kidney, heart, liver, tongue, et al. In olden times the leftover scraps from the table, mostly the internal organs, were ground, salted,

²⁵ In the 1858 inventory of the Dollhopf house, there were two pigs.

dried, or smoked, and preserved as sausage. Today the parts used for sausage are set aside immediately after cooking, since using table scraps for sausage does not conform with modern sanitary practices.

Often these seasonal slaughtering days were, and still are, connected with various village and church customs, such as the *kerwa*. The *kerwa*, celebrated throughout Germany at different times, is an annual celebration of the founding of the local village church. It is typically an outdoor festival with plenty of food, music, dancing, costumes, and *gemüchlichkeit* – much like our traditional church picnics in the US, but far more elaborate, and sometimes lasting for days.

In most rural households it was necessary to gather a large number of helpers from the village on the day of the slaughter. Many helpers ensured that the many tasks – from scalding and cutting up the slaughtered animal to stirring the blood, boiling the meat, washing the intestines, preparing, seasoning and scalding the sausages, etc. – were carried out smoothly. Grateful for all of the help, the owners of the pig would reward the helpers with sausage soup, freshly cooked kettle meat and, above all, plenty of fresh sausages.²⁶



Various cuts of pork and sausages floating in a vat of sauerkraut.

Different customs and rituals developed and flourished from village to village. Such traditions included the hiring of special butchers who brought with them their own “special” recipes (even secret recipes that curious helpers would try to unveil), the assignment of specific tasks to adults and children alike, the order in which the meat was to be consumed (first the fat parts, then the lean), and even which individuals would be honored with the most desirous cuts of meat.

Bernd Hammon, our third cousin, who was born in 1959 in the Dollhopf house #19 and still lives there, shared with me the story that as a small boy he was responsible for holding the pig’s tail to prevent it from running away as it was killed.

Today there are still many inns throughout Franconia that stage seasonal, if not weekly, *schlachtschüssel* “events.”

For a brief video of a present day *schlachtschüssel*, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AugCsHR3_-A

²⁶ <https://www.genussregion-oberfranken.de/spezialitaeten/schlachtschuessel-nach-oberfraenkischer-tradition/>