



# Dollhopf

## 600 Years in the Baking

### Dollhopf Women

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

### World View, Way of Life, and Witchcraft

As uneducated peasants, the world view of our Dollhopf grandmothers was extremely limited. They lived in a world shaped by forces beyond their understanding or control: a world of religious domination driven by mysticism, magic, and superstition. They lived in a world ruled by secular and religious lords – they could not own land, could not practice a trade, had no political standing, few legal rights, and their marriages were arranged.

They had little to no opportunity to get ahead in life – at least according to our 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities.

As lowly farmer wives, tied to the soil in a remote farming region such as Mistelbach, they were insulated from the brave new world emerging from the Dark Ages – a world of scientific discovery, flourishing art, and global exploration.

While Copernicus was discovering that the earth revolved around the sun, they were digging in the fields. While da Vinci was painting the Mona Lisa, they were digging in the fields. While Columbus was sailing to the western hemisphere, they were digging in the fields. When Napoleon conquered Europe, they were...well, you get my point. Evidenced by the picture at right, they were still digging in the fields – by hand – well into the 1900s.<sup>1</sup>

The great majority of our grandparents before the 1800s could not read or write – especially the women.<sup>2</sup> Writers of the period described peasants as “stupid brutes,” their lives repressibly



**German Peasant Women Digging Potatoes, 1920, Germany.** <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-agriculturewomen-and-boys-harvesting-potatoes-1920sexact-location-unknowngermany-174821162.html>

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<sup>1</sup> The peasant women in the photo are digging potatoes. Potatoes, it should be noted, were brought to Europe in the mid 1500s by the Spanish explorers of South America. The potato quickly spread throughout Europe as a cheap, nutritious, and easy to grow food source, and, as a root vegetable, could be stored for long periods.

<sup>2</sup> There are court documents demonstrating that certain of our male ancestors could sign their name, but none for women. Whether they could write beyond signing their name is not known. By some estimates, less than five percent of the German population was literate.

shaped by the upper classes, the Church, and the day-to-day struggle to feed themselves, ward off disease, and secure refuge from the ravages of weather, domestic gangs, and foreign armies.

In 1842, Pastor Johann Hübsch of St. Mary's Church in Gesees, the village next to Mistelbach, a keen observer of local customs, wrote an extended history of the region. Sensitive to the criticism that the local peasants were considered stupid brutes, he came to the defense of his parishioners... well, at least a few of them:

It would be unforgivable to declare the peasants as wholly less gifted or weak-minded, and to place them in the class of the "stupid peasants" with that reprehensible arrogance. Whoever lives long in this village finds not only more wit, cunning, and cleverness, but also here and there more sound reasoning and correct insight into higher things than he was inclined to expect at first. Almost every village has a few men who possess a good store of general knowledge and can express thoughts orally and in writing in a comprehensible and clear manner and to lead a good life. [Note that he does not include women in this statement.]

But since agriculture and animal husbandry are the favorite occupations in the whole country, and even the most indispensable trades are learned only by a few, and practiced regularly by still fewer, unless special circumstances or physical weakness compel them to do so, from early childhood the mind is devoted to farming and the peasant has in general less sense and receptivity for science and higher education. The majority is content with the ordinary school lessons and their provisional acquisition, and after dismissal from school they devote themselves completely and undividedly to farming, which then takes up all the time and strength of the body and soul.<sup>3</sup>

In the mid 1800s boys and girls attended school until the age of 12 or 13, roughly 8th grade. This was true in the US as well. It was not until the generation of the children of Edward and Susan Dollhopf in the 1930s that they attended high school. Before the 1800s, although there was a school in Mistelbach beginning around 1540, children did not necessarily attend school because there was a fee and children were expected to help with farming chores as soon as they were able. Even for those who attended school, attendance was at best "uneven." It could safely be assumed that many parents thought farm work came first.

And indeed, it did. Our peasant ancestors lived hand-to-mouth. Their small farms could barely support the families in the best of times.<sup>4</sup> Severe wind and hailstorms, bitter cold spells, insect swarms, plant blights, mice and rat infestations – not to mention invading human armies – wiped out crops indiscriminately, denying them and their animals of food for years at a time. Obtaining food was a daily struggle.

They lived in filth and suffered the widespread diseases of poverty – dysentery, typhus, tuberculosis, and the most feared of all, bubonic plague.

Wars, famines, disease, and debilitating inflation were endured by nearly every generation of our family until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>3</sup> Das Geseeser Büchlein des Pfarrers J. G. Ad. Hübsch: Ein Heimatbuch zur Orts- und Kirchengeschichte von Gesees 1321-2005.

<sup>4</sup> It was in the best interest of the nobility to keep the farms small so that peasants did not accumulate wealth, and therefore, economic power.

Their social lives were narrow, confined to a village – Mistelbach – of no more than a few hundred people. In 1398, according to the feudal tax book of Margrave Johann III,<sup>5</sup> there were 19 farming families in Mistelbach, or about 100 people.<sup>6</sup> By 1632, two hundred years later, it had only grown to 35 families, or about 185 people, and by 1800, two hundred years after that, it numbered 80 families, or about 425 people. *It grew by only 60 families in 400 years.* (The land area of Mistelbach is only 2.4 square miles.)

That village was their world. Before planes, trains, and automobiles, most of our peasant ancestors possibly traveled no further than the four-mile trip to the markets in nearby Bayreuth. By contrast, I have traveled over four *million* miles (on planes) in my lifetime. Can I even begin to understand their limited and narrow world view? Could they understand mine?

Not only was Mistelbach poor, rural, and isolated, it was slow, very slow, to change, slower than most rural villages. This is not my opinion; it is a shared observation of historians and anthropologists of the region.

To understand their way of life is to first understand their geography. Mistelbach today is a village of 1,600 people, and although still a farming area, it is mostly a suburb of nearby Bayreuth, a city of 75,000. Bayreuth is the largest metro area within an administrative district (similar to a county in the US) called *Oberfranken* (“Upper Franconia”). Oberfranken is one of three districts of the ancient region of Franken (“Franconia”). The other districts are *Unterfranken* (Lower Franconia) and *Mittelfranken* (Middle Franconia).

It is situated in a hilly, culturally distinct, agricultural region called the *Hummelgau*,<sup>7</sup> an area of only about 100 square miles. There are 24 villages in the Hummelgau, the “largest” (I use that term lightly) are Mistelgau, Hummeltal, Gesees, Glashütten, and Mistelbach.<sup>8</sup> Given that our ancestors typically married someone within walking distance, it should not surprise you that we have ancestors from nearly all these villages.

It is so culturally distinct that to this day the dialect of some Hummelgau inhabitants is often difficult to understand by other German speakers.<sup>9</sup>

The Hummelgau in turn occupies the northern third of a geographic region known as the *Fränkische Schweiz*, or “Franconian Switzerland,” so called because of its dolomite outcroppings characteristic of the mountains of Switzerland. To give you some idea of its remoteness, it was not popularly identified on maps as the Fränkische Schweiz until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. A prominent feature of the landscape is a gorge formed by the Wiesent River that originates about five miles southwest of Mistelbach near the village of Glasshütten, and since the 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>5</sup> “Margrave” – a title similar to duke, earl, viscount, etc. – was the title of the rulers of the Mistelbach area. In 1398 the Margrave was Johann III of Nürnberg. In the first year of his reign, he compiled a *Lehenbuch* (“land book”) – a register of all of his peasants including the land they held and the taxes they owed.

<sup>6</sup> The average size of a peasant family was 5.33 – fewer children than one might think, due to frequent miscarriages, high rates of infant mortality, and the scarcity of food.

<sup>7</sup> *Hummelgau* translates from the German as “bumble bee,” but the name has nothing to do with the insect. It is derived from *Hommelgedin*, the word for a Franconian medieval court of law.

<sup>8</sup> Full list of villages: 1) Gesees, 2) Forkendorf, 3) Rödendorf, 4) Oberschreez, 5) Culmberg, 6) Gosen, 7) Haag, 8) Spänfleck, 9) Hohefichte, 10) Eichenreuth, 11) Pettendorf, 12) Pittersdorf, 13) Creez, 14) Schobertsreuth, 15) Voitsreuth, 16) Culm, 17) Bärnreuth, 18) Mistelgau, 19) Glashütten, 20) Tröbersdorf, 21) Seitenbach, 22) Plösen, 23) Gollenbach, 24) Mistelbach.

<sup>9</sup> In 2017 when I visited Mistelbach, our third Cousin Bernd Hammon drove me to the village of Oberwaiz, about 6 miles northwest, to visit the farmhouse where our great-grandfather Johann lived when his mother Margarethe remarried. I asked Bernd to ask the owner if the house still belonged to the family of Johann Hacker, our great-grandfather’s stepfather. He knocked on the door, talked with the owner for about 10 minutes, then returned to the car. “What did he say?” I asked. He looked at me and shrugged his shoulders. “I have no idea,” he said. “I can’t understand his thick accent.” He only lived six miles from Mistelbach!

has been a popular tourist destination. The region is also famous for its high density of breweries – Franconians consume more beer per capita than any other region of Germany.



*Franken ("Franconia") is the territory roughly within the above rectangle. Fränkische Schweiz lies within the triangle and the Hummelgau within the circle. The distance from Nürnberg to Bayreuth is 50 miles.*

Whether because it does not sit on a major river or trade route, or because of its rugged terrain, or simply because of historical accident, the Bayreuth area has often been described as remote or "extremely secluded." Mark Twain,

who visited Bayreuth in 1891 to attend the Wagner Opera Festival, mockingly described the “city” of Bayreuth as merely a large village with inadequate hotels and eating houses.<sup>10</sup>

In its early history, Bayreuth suffered inordinately from many plagues and wars – it was completely destroyed in the Hussite War of 1430, suffered repeatedly from the plague until 1602, was decimated by fires notably in 1605 and 1621, and again nearly destroyed in the Thirty Years War in the 1630s. Recovery after these successive disasters was difficult --and so the area was slow to develop economically.

In 1791, Margrave Christian Friederich Carl Alexander sold Bayreuth and the entire margraviate (principality or kingdom headed by a margrave) of Franconia to the northern German kingdom of Prussia. So, for a period of time, fifteen years, our ancestors were citizens of Prussia.

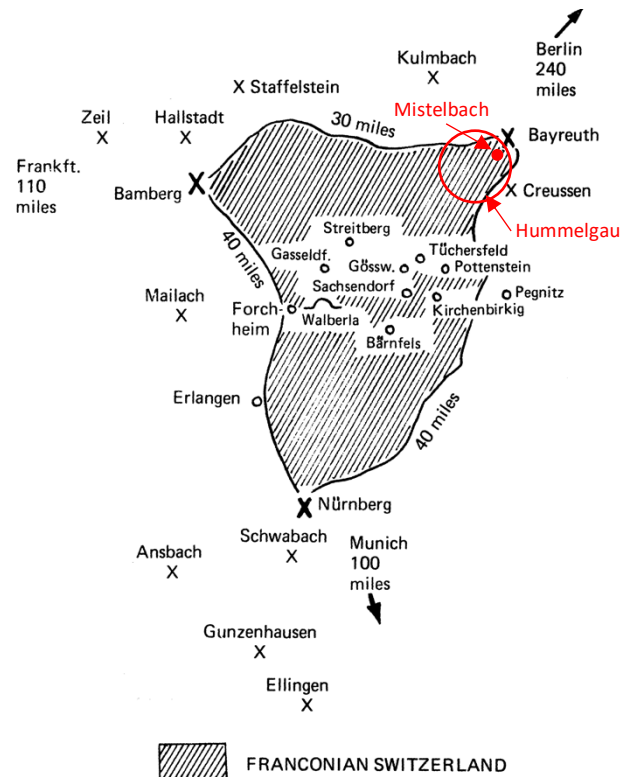
In 1806, Napoleon defeated Prussia in the War of the Fourth Coalition, and so then our ancestors became French. Shortly thereafter, in 1810, Napoleon sold Franconia to King Maximilian of Bavaria. Although culturally distinct from Bavaria, the area today remains the northern territory of the German state of Bavaria.

But please don't call the residents of Mistelbach Bavarians; they are Franconians, and proud of it.

The remoteness of this region and its slow rate of cultural change is further evidenced by the peculiar practice of folk magic – a practice rooted in the Middle Ages – that remained a part of the social fabric until the mid 1900s.

In the 1970s, Arizona State University sociologist Hans Sebald conducted extensive research in the region documenting this cultural vestige. In his 1980 ethnography, “Franconian Witchcraft: The Demise of a Folk Magic,” he noted how remote and isolated the region was:

This paper describes the last phase of a long tradition of folk magic among the peasants in a secluded part of central Germany called Franconian Switzerland [Fränkische Schweiz], where classical witchcraft has survived into the 20th century. The lingering of this heritage may in part be explained by the unmitigated adherence to medieval Catholicism and by the region's extraordinary seclusion that, until recently, prevented disturbance of ancient customs. The reason for this part of Germany being called "Switzerland" is geographic nicknaming for the dolomite crags of the Jura Mountains that shelter it like a fortress rising from the surrounding



*The Fränkische Schweiz (“Franconian Switzerland”). Mistelbach is located next to Bayreuth. The Fränkische Schweiz Museum is in Tüchersfeld, in the middle of the drawing. Our 3<sup>rd</sup> cousin Alfred Dollhopf lives in Erlangen, center left. Anne Dollhopf lives in Nürnberg at the bottom tip.*

<sup>10</sup> Mark Twain’s Travel Letters From 1891-92; Chicago Daily Tribune, December 6, 1891, <http://www.twainquotes.com/Travel1891/Dec1891.html>

flatlands. The outcropping forms a triangle with sides of roughly 40-40-30 miles, with the cities of Nürnberg, Bamberg and Bayreuth at the corners.

The countryside is rugged, without a railroad or major highway, and until recently has been bypassed by the progress of German society. I became more fully aware of how withdrawn this province is when, on one of my visits, I talked to the director of the Institute of Sociology at the University Erlangen-Nürnberg, only 30 miles from the heart of the region, and learned that the folk magic of the rural hinterland had escaped the attention of the academics. The inhabitants have retained ancient customs, practice folk Catholicism, and have a simple farm technology.

It was not until the 1950s that the tractor was added to their farming technology. Even so, this innovation proved of limited value since small farms and rough terrain rendered advanced machinery unprofitable; hence some farmers have been reluctant to give up cows as draft animals. The farmers have no tradition of specialization and have tried to survive on self-sufficient homesteads.

They have barely succeeded in as much as a typical farmer had only 10 to 13 acres on which to raise grains, potatoes, beets, clover, grass and so forth. The variety was needed to feed a variety of mouths human and animal, the latter typically consisting of two or three cows, a few pigs, some rabbits, a flock of chickens, and a gaggle of geese. In return, the peasants expected flour, bread, milk, butter, cheese, eggs, meats, and feathers for bedding. Surplus, if there was any, purchased things they could not produce.<sup>11</sup>

When considering that they had large families (averaging four to five children), self-sufficiency on such a small-scale perpetuated poverty, sometimes caused hunger, and meant long and hard-working hours.

The self-sufficiency of the farm is of sociological significance. Because there was little need or opportunity to interact with complementary farmers or traders, it maintained a high degree of social isolation. Hence, life remained extremely family centered and family dependent. Isolation and delays in the introduction of modern technology, science, and medicine also meant delay in



*The **Hummelgau** – an area of farming villages sharing a distinct culture and dialect, lies within the Fränkische Schweiz. It is small; the distance from Mistelbach to Glashütten is about five miles. If a current resident of this area has an ancestor who lived here before 1800, there is an 85% chance that we are today related.*

<sup>11</sup> This is an accurate description of the Dollhopf farms from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

the empirical understanding of accidents, diseases, and death. Medieval beliefs have therefore had a chance to flourish longer than in surrounding areas.<sup>12</sup>

Not all of the villages in the Fränkische Schweiz converted to Protestantism as did Mistelbach. Some remained Catholic and indeed sought retribution against those villages that followed the heretical Luther. During the struggle in the Thirty Years War between Catholics and Protestants, Mistelbach was raided and torched in 1632 by their neighbors from the nearby Catholic villages of Waischenfeld and Hollfeld.

However, even in the Protestant villages, centuries old Catholic customs and traditions persisted. For the average peasant the biggest change in their lives as a result of the Reformation was probably the fact that the tithe paid to the Catholic Church now went to the Protestant nobles.<sup>13</sup> Same tax, different collection plate. I think it highly unlikely that our great grandparents cared much about consubstantiation or justification by faith, tenets of Lutheran theology. But I could be wrong.

Author Sebald, born in Selb, a village about 40 miles east of Mistelbach, had personal knowledge of the witchcraft and magic of the region – his grandmother was a witch (there were good witches and bad witches; the good ones were “healers”).

Despite the influence of the Church, or perhaps because of it, our ancestors relied on superstition and magic to explain the unexplainable – disease, death, weather, and all other misfortunes; and to obtain the unobtainable – sex, money, power, influence, and long life. Witches had spells for just about anything:

The catalog of spells is long and varied: there are spells to punish an enemy, to secure love, to satisfy lust, to gain riches, to restore health, to gain influential friends, to escape misery of all sorts, to achieve longevity if not immortality, to discover treasures, to win quarrels, and so forth.<sup>14</sup>

To our medieval Mistelbach grandparents, witches, good or evil, were *real* people. And of course, witches were women, because they were the root of all evil having tempted Adam to eat the apple.

It is hard for us in 21<sup>st</sup> century America to imagine the influence that witches could wield, or the mass hysteria caused by the fear of witches. Franconia was the epicenter of such hysteria, and women accused of being witches were executed in great numbers:

The most credible estimates for the number of executions for witchcraft between 1450-1750 are in the range of 40,000 to 60,000 people across Europe, *with southern and central regions of Germany accounting for between 17,000 and 26,000 executions*, as compared to between 5,000 to 6,000 executions for all of France, around 1,000 executions for England and Wales, and a mere 50 estimated executions in Spain, where there was little religious diversity to fuel the fires. The intense witch-hunting in Germany, especially between 1580-1630, has led its leading historian to

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<sup>12</sup> Franconian Witchcraft: The Demise of a Folk Magic. Hans Sebald, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Jul., 1980, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Jul., 1980), pp. 173-187. The George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3317824>

<sup>13</sup> The tithe was a payment of one tenth of income and farm production. Today we know the tithe as a voluntary contribution to the church or a charity, a practice which very, very few Americans practice. But in Mistelbach the tithe was mandatory. Not really a contribution!

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 173-187.

assert that “witchcraft is as ‘German’ as the Hitler phenomenon, and will similarly occupy our attention for a while longer.”<sup>15</sup>

There is no direct evidence that witches were executed in Mistelbach, but the hysteria and fear of witches in the late 1500s was probably not lost on our grandparents. Witches found their way into everyday life, in stories passed down from generation to generation.

As we know, many of these stories were collected and documented by the Brothers Grimm, whose most famous fairy tales featured witches – among them *Hansel and Gretel*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Rapunzel*. The witch’s avatar was the evil stepmother, featured in *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and a host of other fairy tales.



**Burning at the Stake** – execution of a witch from the medieval treatise “*Malleus Maleficarum*,” first published in 1486 by Heinrich Kramer. Burning at the stake was the preferred form of execution for witches. In central Germany it is estimated that 17,000 to 26,000 women were executed in the late Middle Ages, far more than in other regions of Europe. The most intensive period for executions was from 1580 to 1630, during the lives of our 8<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> great-grandparents. Vestiges of witchcraft remained in the Mistelbach region until the mid 1900s.

that a witch could eat you alive! A Stephen King horror story!

Although the moral of *Hansel and Gretel* is debated and somewhat obscure, many folklorists posit that it was told to children to reinforce the symbolic order of the patriarchal home – because, in the end, it was the loving father who welcomed Hansel and Gretel home, not the evil stepmother whose plan it was to abandon the children in the woods.<sup>16</sup>

Their first collection of folk stories was published in 1812 under the title *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (“*Children’s and Household Tales*”). Although first published in 1812, the tale of *Hansel and Gretel* is thought to have originated in Germany in the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century. There are many origin theories, and many variations on the theme, precisely because it was oral tradition, retold countless times by parents to their terrified children.

Today we call these stories “fairy” tales, harmless flights of childhood fancy, a Disneyland ride.

But many of the Grimm tales are dark and foreboding, meant to frighten children into submission. To the children of our ancestors, *Hansel and Gretel* was not a story about two munchkins merrily skipping through the woods scattering breadcrumbs. Rather it was a frightful story of childhood abandonment and cannibalism (when infant abandonment, caused by famine, was real). To a child, how scary to think

<sup>15</sup> Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry, and Reason of State in Early Modern Europe*, 1989 & 1997. <https://streetsofsalem.com/2011/10/24/german-witches/>

<sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hansel\\_and\\_Gretel#Sources](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hansel_and_Gretel#Sources)



Stories that reinforced family stability were no doubt a theme in the Fränkische Schweiz because of its out-of-the-ordinary close knit family culture. Sebald noted that “life remained *extremely* family centered and family dependent” – this is how they managed to survive on small subsistence level farms. It might be comforting to readers today to think that our ancestors were more family oriented than the ordinary lot, but this was not so much by choice as it was a matter of survival.

In this part of the world peasants, including our Dollhopfs, eked out existence on small farms barely large enough to feed themselves. (I documented the land holdings of each of our Dollhopf ancestors in *Blog 18: Land Owned.*)

Why did the farms in this region remain small? In part, the Dollhopfs had small farms because the nobility wanted it that way – not the Dollhopfs specifically, but peasants generally. The aristocracy didn’t want peasants to amass large holdings to compete with them, or, God forbid, that a wealthy peasant might be able to buy his freedom. Free men didn’t pay taxes. Not good if you were a lord.

Farms also remained small due to *partible* (as opposed to *impartible*) inheritance, the custom practiced in this part of Germany. Inherited farm property was equally subdivided and distributed among the male sons – but, importantly, the daughters received an equal share in the form of monetary payments.

Every time a peasant landowner died, the family farm was subdivided, assuming that there was more than one male heir, or more than one male heir interested in being a farmer. Estimates varied, but a farm of roughly 12 acres was necessary to produce enough food to sustain the average peasant family of two adults and three children. If the farm was smaller than 12 acres, the peasant had to practice a trade in addition to farming to earn supplemental income.

On average, our Dollhopf grandfathers possessed only 5.5 acres of arable land. Only once did one of our grandfathers – the “industrious” Hanss d. Ältere (“the elder”) Dollhopf (1629-1710) – acquire close to what was needed for basic subsistence level food production. By the time he died, he had “amassed” 11 acres of arable land – 15 acres if you include meadows and woods. His son, our 7<sup>th</sup> great grandfather Hans d. Jüngere “the younger,” predeceased his father and the farm went to his two grandchildren and was divided in half.

It was difficult for peasants to acquire land because they were living hand to mouth, and they had no discretionary income. Their small farms and subsistence level food production not only made survival difficult, but since they had no surplus crops, they were not able to conduct trade with other villages, trade which could have increased opportunities for the purchase of land or other “business” opportunities.

Our peasant ancestors for the most part led isolated, uneducated, superstitious, dirt-poor lives, unable to free themselves from the yokes of poverty, disease, wars, thievery, and famine.



*The witch welcomes Hansel and Gretel into her hut. Illustration by Arthur Rackham, 1909. Dark stories with witches and evil stepmothers, meant to frighten children, were deeply embedded in the local culture.*

And the Dollhopf women bore the brunt of it.

Next in the series on Dollhopf women: Subjugation.

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