



Dollhopf

600 Years in the Baking

Dollhopf Women

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

Education

The earliest evidence of a schoolhouse in Mistelbach is inferred from a reference in the St. Bartholomew Church baptismal register of 1555. It listed a godmother who was identified as the “daughter of the schoolmaster” – a clue that there must have been a school in Mistelbach by that time.

In 1534, George the Pious, then Margrave of the territory that included Mistelbach, converted the region to Protestantism (reportedly after personally meeting with Martin Luther to gain his blessing). When he converted the Catholic parishes of the territory, “he despoiled [looted] the churches and cloisters in his domains of all their gold and silver, their monstrances, vessels, chalices, pearls, jewels, images, and precious vestments.”¹

He used the money obtained through this looting to pay off the debts of his profligate father, Frederick the Elder, and, most nobly, to establish schools for his peasants. Thus, it is likely that a school was established in Mistelbach in the late 1530s or early 40s. The funds would have been used to pay the wages of a schoolmaster, who, in a small village like Mistelbach, conducted classes on the dirt floor of his small house. His house was thus the “school” house.

We know from accounts in the Mistelbach Chronicle that the schoolmaster’s house was destroyed in 1632 during the Thirty Years War, and it was not until 1706 that a new school was built. In later years, in the mid 1800s (an exact date is not known), the school was built next to the church – immediately across the street from Dollhopf house #19.



George the Pious (1484-1543) Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach, by painter Lucas Cranach the Younger (1515-1586). George was the Margrave ruling over Mistelbach during the Reformation and was responsible for the conversion of the church in Mistelbach to Protestantism (along with most other churches in Franconia), and for establishing schools with the money he looted from the formerly Catholic parishes. The painter of this portrait, Lucas Cranach the Younger, was born in Wittenberg, but his family was from Kronach, a village 30 miles from Mistelbach. He and his father, Lucas Cranach the Elder, also a famous painter, were both friends of Martin Luther, and had a flourishing art studio in Wittenberg.

¹ Catholic Churches, even in small villages, held objects of great value. A *monstrance* was an ornate stand, often gold or silver, that displayed the consecrated Host (communion wafer). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George,Margrave_of_Brandenburg-Ansbach

In the early Middle Ages, especially before the Reformation, children were treated like little adults and expected to work as soon as they could lift a hoe or carry firewood. Although schools existed in castles, cathedrals, monasteries, convents, and the like, they were mostly accessible only by the affluent. There would be no such opportunities in a rural peasant village.

If girls were sent off to convents, they could be as young as seven, and this happened more frequently to orphaned girls. There is no evidence that any Dollhopf women or girls entered convents, although there were indeed Dollhopf women who left Mistelbach – we know they left because there are no dates given in the church books for their deaths. The books do not list where they went, or what they did. Most likely they were married off to men in other, mostly nearby, villages.



In this recent photo, St. Bartholomew Church is flanked on the left by the Dollhopf house #19 and on the right by the schoolhouse. A school was first built on this site in 1706. The building in the photo was built in 1873 and converted into the Parish Hall in 1990. The Dollhopf house was reconstructed in 1823 after the Great Fire of Mistelbach. Our great-grandfather left Mistelbach at the age of seven when his mother remarried a farmer from the nearby village of Oberwaiz. He may have attended school there, but Oberwaiz was so small it would not be hard to imagine that he attended school in another village, perhaps Mistelbach. Because the school building above was built in 1873, none of our direct ancestors were schooled in this building.

Children were able to attend school from the age of six or seven to 12 or 13 – if they went to school at all. There was a fee to attend school, so it is likely that not all of the desperately poor peasants could afford it. I imagine that school for many impoverished children was possible in some years and not others, so schooling at best was hit or miss. As was the case with any rural community, schooling came after necessary chores – like tending the fields or caring for the livestock – especially at planting and harvest times.

In times of war, plague, or famine, one can assume that school was not a priority.

I imagine that schooling also depended on the attitude of the parents. Many peasant parents, as is common in poor societies, probably thought that children should be working rather than learning to read or write. “We never learned, why should they?”

In court documents dating from the late 1700s to the early 1800s some of our grandmothers signed with an “X” – a clear indication that they could not read or write, despite the presence of a school. Most of our grandfathers, however, appeared to be able to sign their names, probably indicating that they were more likely to receive at least a minimal education. It is interesting that many of the men unexplainedly used different spellings of Dollhopf, perhaps an indication that they weren’t thoroughly “schooled.”

We do not have any surviving letters or written documents from our Mistelbach ancestors – no inscribed family Bibles for example – so it is not clear if, or when, they were able to read or write.² We have several letters written by our great-grandfather John Dollhopf, the earliest dating from 1874, so we know that he could write, but it is not entirely clear to whether the orphaned girl he married, Elizabeth Bender, could.

Certainly, men needed a rudimentary knowledge of reading and math to be able to conduct a trade, if indeed they sold or bartered items such as flour, clothing, shoes, meat, produce, etc. Otherwise, there was no compelling reason for a peasant to read or write. Before the invention of the European printing press in the mid 1400s, there was nothing for a poor peasant to read, and therefore arguably no reason to learn.³

Widely distributed printed pamphlets or flyers (documents that travel far and wide, hence “flyers”) were not common until the 1500s. (They were in part responsible for provoking peasants to rebel in the Peasant Wars of the 1500s.)

As late as the mid 1800s, Pastor Hübsch of St. Mary’s Church in the neighboring village of Gesees, noted in his history of the region that the peasants did not read much. As poor farmers there was no need to apply any knowledge they might have acquired as children. Writing in 1842 he noted the only books to be found in the houses of the local peasants were the Bible, the hymnal, the catechism, and here and there a special prayer and sermon book.

And remember, our ancestors would not have been able to read the Bible until Martin Luther translated it into German. Our grandparents, who most likely didn’t read or write German, certainly did not read Hebrew or Greek, and even if they did, I cannot imagine that they would endeavor to travel to the nearest cathedral or monastery – days away – to study the Bible!

Prior to the Reformation, and probably for decades well after, the local village priest was responsible for translating the Word of God and conveying it to his flock. The first published version of Luther’s Bible translation appeared in 1534 (although other translations by other German translators appeared as early as 1460).⁴ Our grandparents probably did not have access to published versions until the late 1500s at the very earliest, but this is still highly unlikely. In the Dollhopf household inventory of 1858, *three hundred years* later, there was no mention of a Bible (or any other book).

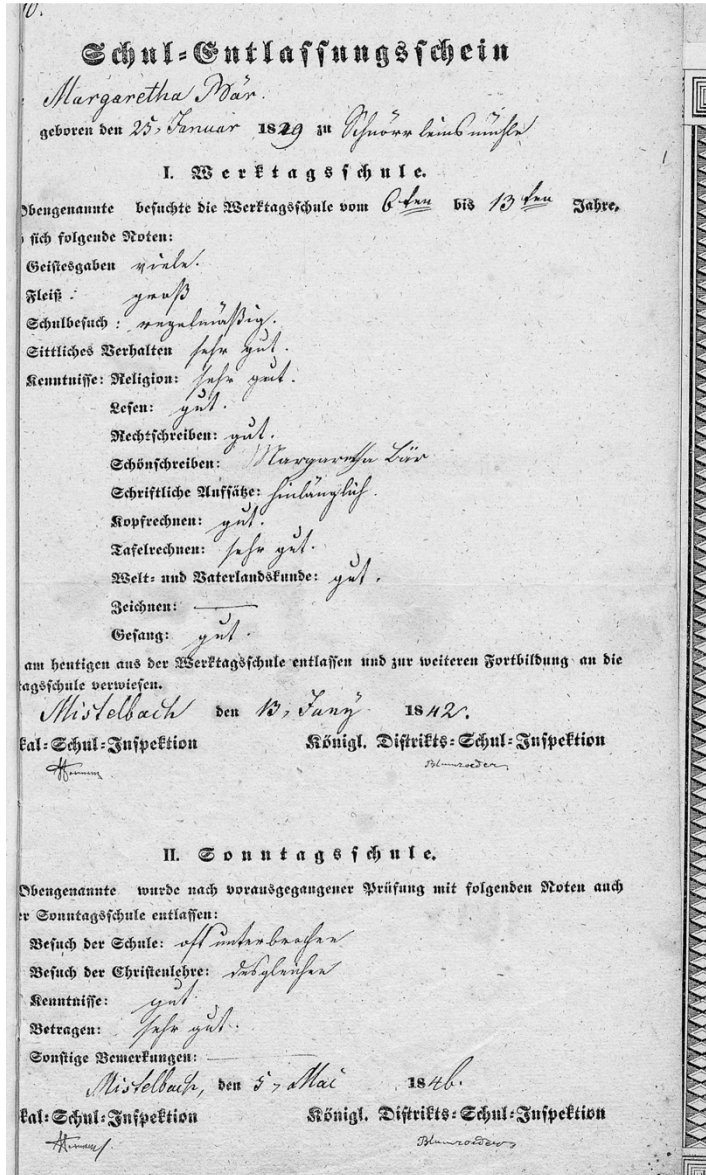
In the 1830s and 40s we know that our 2nd great-grandparents Margarethe Bär and Johann Dollhopf both attended grade school, or as it is loosely translated, “weekday” school (as opposed to “Sunday” school). We have copies of

² We do have three letters written by our great-grandfather John from the early 1900s, when he was already living in America. His handwriting and spelling was impeccable, an indication that he was well schooled.

³ Printing presses appeared in China 150 years before Europe.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther_Bible

their “school-leaving” certificates, or what we know today as report cards. They were required to provide these certificates to the local authorities, along with other documents, to obtain permission to marry. Because of laws designed to restrict marriages in those difficult times, they had to prove that they were upstanding, and apparently educated, individuals worthy of marriage.⁵



At left is a photo of Margarethe Bär’s weekday school-leaving certificate of June 13, 1842. She was 13 at the time. Her teacher was Konrad Dörfler. The certificate says that she attended school from the age of 6 to the age of 13. Here is a translation of the marks she received:

- Intellectual gifts:** *Many.*
- Diligence:** *Great.*
- School attendance:** *Regularly.*
- Moral conduct:** *Very good.*
- Knowledge:** *Very good.*
- Religion:** *Very good.*
- Reading:** *Good.*
- Orthography:** *Good.*
- Calligraphy:** *Margaretha Bär.*
- Written essays:** *Sufficient.*
- Mental arithmetic:** *Good.*
- Blackboard arithmetic:** *Very good.*
- Geography:** *Good.*
- Drawing:** -----
- Singing:** *Good.*

She was dismissed from the weekday school and then, for further education, sent to Sunday School. Essentially, she was through with academic instruction.

So, we know she could read and write (and apparently sing, but drawing was another matter....). She might have been the first Dollhopf woman to read or write, but this would only be a guess.

In the early Middle Ages, before her time, girls were mostly expected to learn everything they needed to know from their mothers, which did *not* necessarily include reading and writing.

This is the weekday (elementary) school graduation report of our great-great-grandmother Margarethe Bär issued on June 13, 1842 when she was 13. The government was making it difficult for peasants to marry; she was required to produce this report – documenting her upstanding moral conduct and learned abilities – to the town council for permission to marry Johann Dollhopf.

⁵ Because of overpopulation, poverty, and famine, the government was trying to prevent or delay marriage and discourage childbearing (it didn’t work).

In fact, common beliefs of the time held that girls who developed their brains would hinder the growth of their ovaries and uterus.⁶ Sad, but this is what they believed.

I do not know which of our grandmothers before Margarethe Bär, if any, attended school. Certainly, they did not before the mid 1500s when a school was established in in Mistelbach. But, as evidenced by Margarethe's report card, by the 1800s school was likely the norm for most children.

Circumstances were similar in America. Our great-grandmother Elizabeth Bender Dollhopf (1857-1951), seen at right, was indentured to the Harmony Society in Ambridge, Pennsylvania at the age of seven, along with her twin sister Mathilda. The contract for her indenture stated that the masters of the Harmony Society will teach her the "art and mystery of housekeeping," and they "shall and will teach and instruct, or cause to be and instructed in the best manner that they can; also, during all the said term shall and will provide and allow unto the said Apprentice competent and sufficient meat, drink, washing, lodging, and learn her to read and writ – exactly their words and spelling!

"Learn her to read and writ".... I hope that the person who the drafted this contract was not the teacher. Her indenture appears on the next page.

She also would have finished her formal education at the Harmony Society by the age of 12 or 13, but she was indentured as an apprentice until the age of 19.

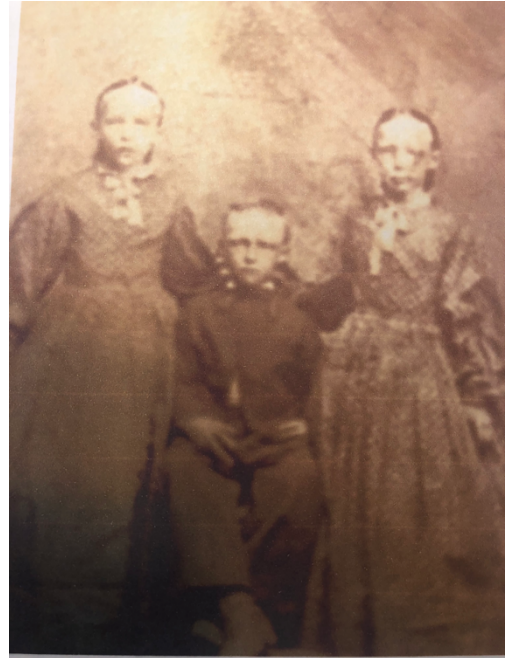
Her daughters (three of 12 children) – Jenny, Flora and Elanora, sisters of our grandfather Edward – attended the Spring Hill School, which did not go beyond the sixth grade. I do not believe that any of that generation attended high school.

The next generation – the grandchildren of Elizabeth and Johann, including Ed, Ruth, Lois, Roland and LaVerne – made the giant leap: all attended high school, and Lois, Roland and LaVerne attended college. This was a major leap forward in the arc of the Dollhopf family.

Today we take for granted that women attend college (in fact women outnumber men in college in this generation 2:1). Two generations ago extremely few women attended college (fewer than 1% attended college prior to WWII). Three generations ago most didn't attend high school. A mere four generations ago they were fortunate to be able to read or write. How far we have come in a relatively short span.

Next in the series on Dollhopf women: Marriage.

Mark R. Dollhopf
New Haven, CT
January 2, 2023.



As of this writing, this is the only known photo (to me) of our great-grandmother Elisabeth Bender, her twin sister Mathilda, and their younger brother Henry. I assume this was taken shortly before the children were separated and Elizabeth and Mathilda were indentured in 1865. Henry was not indentured but was adopted by a family near the Harmony Society. The twins were about six or seven years old. Sadly, I do not know which is Elizabeth.

⁶ Clarke, Edward H. (1873). Sex in Education, Or, a Fair Chance for Girls. Project Gutenberg. p. 178.

THIS INDENTURE,




MADE the 12th day of January in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty five **Witnesseth**, That *Elisabeth Bender* aged *seven* years *nine* months and *twenty one* days, by and with the consent of *her Father George Bender* hath put, and by these presents doth voluntarily put *herself* an Apprentice to *the Trustees of the Harmony Society* with *them* to serve after the manner of an Apprentice, from the date of these presents, until *she* the said *Elisabeth Bender* arrives at the full age of *eighteen* years; during which term the said Apprentice *the said masters* faithfully shall serve in all lawful business, according to *her* power, wit and ability, honestly, orderly and obediently in all things demean *herself* towards *her* said *masters* during said term. And *R. L. Baker & Jacob Harrier Trustees* the said *masters* doth for *themselves their Successors* heirs, executors and administrators, covenant and grant to and with the said Apprentice, that *they* the said *Elisabeth* the said Apprentice in the art and mystery of a *Housekeeping* shall and will teach and instruct, or cause to be taught and instructed in the best manner that *they* can; also, during all the said term shall and will provide and allow unto the said Apprentice, competent and sufficient meat, drink, washing, lodging and *learn her to read and writ*

and all other things necessary and fit for an Apprentice. And at the end of said term, *shall and will deliver to the said Elisabeth 2 Suits of Clothes one of which to be new, also a Bed.*

In Witness Whereof, The parties have hereunto interchangeably set their hands, and affixed their seals, the day and year first above written.

SEALED AND DELIVERED }
IN PRESENCE OF }

Daniel Schreiber

Elisabeth Bender 
Georg Bender 
R. L. Baker & Harrier Trustees 

This is the Harmony Society indenture contract for our great-grandmother Elizabeth Bender signed on January 12, 1865 at the height of the Civil War. Indenture was a form of adoption. The Harmony Society was a German utopian community in Ambridge, PA. Elizabeth and her twin sister Mathilda were both surrendered to the Society at the age of seven for reasons unknown. She and Mathilda, along with three siblings, were living in Jersey City, Hudson County New Jersey at the time. Their mother, Barbara Mai, had been committed to the Hudson County Insane Asylum also for reasons unknown. Their father, Georg Bender, whose signature is on the above contract, traveled over 400 miles to Ambridge to give them up. Why did he do this? In the signature line Elizabeth signed her name with an "X"; she obviously could not sign her name, perhaps not unusual for a seven-year-old in those days. Note where the signer filled in the blank that the Society would "learn her to read and writ." Good grief. I can't help but think that Elisabeth must have been terrified, knowing that her father was leaving.