



Dollhopf

600 Years in the Baking

Dollhopf Women

ADULT THEMES: This is the fifth essay in a series addressing the life and times of our Dollhopf grandmothers.

Marriage

Aside from bearing children, there was no greater or more impactful event in the life of a peasant woman than her marriage. With little or no chance for an education, few opportunities to practice a trade, limited life outside the home – her value to society and sense of self-worth were based on her ability to bear and raise children – that, according to no less an authority than Martin Luther.

And as with everything else in a peasant's life, marriage was typically beyond her control – in the early Middle Ages her parents almost certainly arranged the marriage, and the parents in turn had to seek approval from the noble or the village administrators appointed by the noble.



A *brautkrone evangelisch* ("evangelical (Protestant) bride crown"), a crown of flowers, mostly myrtle, traditionally worn by peasant brides in Mistelbach. Fränkische Schweiz-Museum, Tüchersfeld.

This practice of obtaining manorial permission for marriage ended with the Margrave Christian I (1603-1655) who attempted to grant the serfs a more dignified life in the wake of the devastating Thirty Years War – "by finally liberating them from the unnatural restriction of neither learning and doing crafts nor marrying without a manorial permit."¹ In other words, you didn't need the permission of the margrave to go to school, practice a trade, or get married. Perhaps then our grandparents married for love. But then again, the Margrave's pronouncement took a long time to reach Mistelbach.

The need for permission to marry was *reintroduced* (or perhaps reinforced, because we don't know if the practice had really been curtailed) in the late 1700s to early 1800s as local governments created enormous financial and legal obstacles to discourage marriage. This was done to limit

population growth because of the intense poverty and famine. Our great-great grandparents Johann and Margaretha had to produce a plethora of documents – e.g., school report cards, military discharge papers, proof of inheritance, financial statements, and affidavits from parents and townspeople – to be approved for marriage, along with stiff fees.

Such restrictions caused an epidemic of childbirths outside of marriage. Johann and Margaretha had four illegitimate babies before they married. For this reason – not to mention the poverty, high taxes, and military service – many residents of Mistelbach fled to America, including our great-grandfather, the son of Johann and Margaretha.

¹ Mistelbach Chronicle.

The period covered in this research is roughly 600 years – from 1400 to today – spanning 17 generations. Marriage customs evolved over time, just as they have evolved in the US over our lifetimes, so it is difficult to draw conclusions about the marriage of any one of our 17 great-grandmothers, especially those before the mid-1600s.

The degree to which marriages were arranged by parents, town councils, or in earlier centuries by the noble or his assigns, varied considerably. In some arranged marriages the couple might have known each other and, perhaps, they were actually “in love” (but mostly not). We can also assume that in others, especially when the bride came from another village, they did not know each other.

The greatest changes to the institution of marriage in these 600 years occurred as a result of Martin Luther and the Reformation.

Surprisingly, marriage was not considered a sacrament by the Catholic Church prior to that time. Before the early 1200s marriage was not even a religious rite – it was simply entered into by “mutual consent.”

According to canon law, two people said “I do” to each other in private, and/or had intercourse, and that was that. You were considered married by the Church. You did not go to church and have your union blessed by a priest or otherwise declare your intentions publicly in front of family, relatives, or other witnesses.

As one might assume, such private or semi-private so-called “secretive” marriages created a multitude of problems. If there were no witnesses, was it truly *mutual* consent? Or was it rape? Was it coercion? Was one party lying? Did they *both* really say, “I do?”

In the early Middle Ages polygamy (more than one spouse) was common, as was incest (not necessarily brother and sister, but often cousins or aunts and uncles).

If one of the parties to a marriage disagreed about consent, were the children legitimate? This led to the most important questions concerning marriage in the early Middle Ages – those concerning money.

Was the bride’s family responsible for a dowry if she did not consent?² Did the husband have to share his property with a woman if he did not believe the child was his, or if his wife said “I do” to someone else? What if the



Franconian wedding tracht (“costume”) from the village of Forchheim, about 30 miles from Mistelbach. She is wearing a brautkrone (“bridal crown”). Catholic and Protestant wedding costumes differed. Catholic garb was more elaborate and conspicuous – fancier cloth and jewelry. Protestant wedding dress was plainer. A display of satin, cashmere, or silk indicated the farmer’s relative wealth. (Hmmm...just like today.) Photo from <https://angiesweb.com/franconia-tracht>.

² A *dowry* is money or property (such as furniture or livestock) given by the bride’s family to her husband upon their marriage. Dowries could be of substantial worth and therefore a cause for concern. It is an ancient custom, no longer practiced in Germany today. The reasons for a dowry are culturally varied; ostensibly it was to offset the

husband said “I do” to a number of women (not uncommon in poor societies today). If the children were not legitimate, were they entitled to the inheritance? Which wife and children received the inheritance? With no church or public record, or witnesses, everything was contentious.

To quell the chaos, the Catholic Church in the 13th century began to exert stronger influence on the institution of marriage.

...for most of the medieval period, marriage belonged to the private sphere of the family, not the public sphere of the Church. Because marriages involved an exchange of property and a linkage of families, they were often arranged by parents or families and celebrated, not in a church, but in private homes, sometimes with, but often without, the formal blessing of the Church or presence of a priest. Thus, the process of Christianizing marriage was slow and difficult in a world full of “illicit, irregular, furtive or clandestine” marriages.

The struggle for the Church, then, was to take marriage “from the private or semi-private spheres of home, domestic rite, or unwitnessed promise and to bring it into the public space of a church.” At length, the Church succeeded in inserting itself into the marriage process. By around 1100 A.D. records indicate that it was becoming common for people to include church ritual as part of a formal marriage, though the political fragmentation of Europe prevented the implementation of any consistent marriage law or rite.³

The Church consolidated and clarified its position on marriage at the Fourth Lateran Council convened by Pope Innocent III in 1215.⁴ Although it did not formally declare marriage a sacrament...

...it insisted that marriages *should* be public and that parents should have a say in their creation. In addition to banning marriage within the fourth degree of consanguinity,⁵ the Fourth Lateran Council had also banned marriages concluded in secrecy. The Council's intent had been to provide an effective means of enforcing consanguinity laws: by making marriage public, incest impediments might come to light more readily. The Council also intended to counteract a series of problems that had arisen from a definition of marriage based on consent and sex. In a court of law, for example, it was difficult to prove or disprove whether the parties to a marriage had exchanged vows consensually or had consummated the union freely. Public marriage placed the

cost of adding another person to the husband's household, although over time it became largely symbolic. This was a practice in cultures that were strongly patrilineal, and the practice had largely disappeared in Germany by the 20th century.

³ The Reformation and the Reform of Marriage: Historical Views and Background for Today's Disputes Susan Mobley, Ph.D., Professor of History, Concordia University Wisconsin, Susan.Mobley@cuw.edu ; <https://issues.cune.edu/the-lgbt-disputes-teaching-and-practice-in-the-church-2/the-reformation-and-the-reform-of-marriage-historical-views-and-background-for-todays-disputes/>

⁴ The Fourth Lateran Council, also known as the “Great Council,” was convoked by Pope Innocent III and attended by 71 patriarchs, 412 bishops, and 900 abbots. It was principally known for defining the concept of *transubstantiation*; that the bread and wine of communion actually turned into the real body and blood of Christ.

⁵ “Within the fourth degree of consanguinity” meant that you could not marry a parent, sibling, uncle or aunt, niece or nephew, grandchild or grandparent, or brother- or sisters-in-law, or first cousin. The Council was reaffirming the ban on such marriages as described in the marriage laws of Leviticus 18:1-18. The purpose of these laws was not to prevent genetic disorders, as we commonly associate with incestuous marriages today (and they would not have known then), but rather to preserve the sanctity of familial relations. Incestuous marriages caused rivalries (especially among males) and led to the disintegration not only of the immediate family, but also the tribe or larger society. It is thought that the ancient Israelites created such rules to preserve not only societal peace and order, but also to ensure *economic* integrity, and unity, in defense of their tribes.

consent of both parties on display and reinforced it with the testimony of witnesses. Also, secret marriages had the potential to invalidate subsequent public marriages and this, in turn, threatened the social functions of marriage as a tool of alliance-making and property transfer.⁶

"Secret" marriages however, whether by consent or intercourse, persisted. The most famous of Catholic theologians, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) – along with other Church Fathers – later argued that marriage was a sacrament, but it was not officially declared one of the seven sacraments until the Council of Trent, which concluded in 1563 – more than 30 years later *after* the Reformation!

The first three generations of our known Dollhopf ancestors (prior to the 1530s) were of course Catholic, and they were likely married in the home as was the tradition. Our 12th great-grandfather Cuntz Dollhopf and his wife (we don't know her name) were married in 1546 – the first of our branch of Dollhopfs to be married in a "Lutheran" church. The church in Mistelbach was converted by Margrave George the Pious sometime between 1528 and 1533.⁷ They could have been married in the home, as was likely still the tradition, and the marriage merely recorded in the church books, but Lutherans were far stricter about marriage and more likely to require the presence of the couple in a church with witnesses and a presiding pastor.

Luther and other German Protestant reformers were extremely critical of the Catholic's divided and ambiguous stance on marriage. The Catholic Church held that celibacy was the highest and holiest calling of men and women, thereby tacitly frowning on marriage, but on the other hand the Church did not want couples secretly entering into "unholy" alliances.

The Reformers wanted to know, "What *was* the Church encouraging – celibacy or marriage?" Luther thought the whole thing was a mess:

How I dread preaching on the estate of marriage! ...the lax authority of both the spiritual and the temporal swords has given rise to so many dreadful abuses and false situations, that I would much prefer neither to look into the matter, nor to hear of it. But timidity is no help in an emergency; I must proceed. I must try to instruct poor bewildered consciences and take up the matter boldly....⁸

Luther argued that celibacy was *not* the natural order or holiest calling, rather that marriage was the natural order, the fundamental basis of society – "the cradle of citizenship," as he described it, ordained by God. And it was the responsibility of the civil state to sanction marriage, exercised through the *local* Church, not the Church in Rome.

Marriage law and marriage practices were important issues for many if not most of the Protestant reformers largely because of the intrinsic connection between marriage and family. For them, the family was "the cradle of citizenship," and marriage "stabilized both individuals and society as a whole." Because "traditional marriage law and doctrine did not adequately respect and support the integrity and autonomy of the family or facilitate its social tasks, its reform was an urgent priority." For many Protestant reformers, marriage was a human

⁶ "Late Medieval Canon Law on Marriage," The University of Oregon, <https://pages.uoregon.edu/dluebke/Reformations441/441MarriageLaw.html>

⁷ In 1533 George the Pious issued the Brandenburg-Nuremberg Church Order, drafted by Andreas Osiander, the Pastor of St. Lorenz Church in Nürnberg. This document advocated for the conversion of Franconian churches to Protestantism. The exact date of the conversion of the church in Mistelbach is not known; some sources cite 1528, but it is more likely that it occurred after the decree. When it converted, the name changed from St. Martin to St. Bartholomäus. The church began keeping marriage records in 1555. Baptism and death records followed shortly thereafter.

⁸ Martin Luther, "The Estate of Marriage," 1522.

institution, though one ordained by God, and as such it fell under the jurisdiction of the civil authorities, though they insisted that the secular government was itself instituted by God and thus its laws and rules should be based upon and reflect God's law. Thus, the reformation of marriage was essential for the reform of theology and the development of Christian faith.⁹



Luther Hammers His 95 Theses to the Door, 1872 by Wilhelm Ferdinand Pauwels, a Belgian history painter who lived and worked in Germany. Luther brought about profound changes to the institution of marriage. There is considerable doubt that he actually nailed the theses to the door of the church, but it makes for great drama.

As a result of the Reformation, the secular nobility – the civil authorities of which Luther spoke – assumed control of village churches, taking the power away (and the valuable silver, gold, and other religious trappings as well) from the Catholic Church and the Pope. As disagreement about the nature of marriage was a principal cause of the Protestants, the civil authorities decided to take matters into their own hands and require that Protestant pastors preside over marriages and make a permanent record of the proceedings in books *to be kept at the local church*.¹⁰

Luther and his reformers had three principal recommendations – parental consent, witnesses, and church registration and solemnization:

First, they [Luther and the Reformers] insisted that, before any such promise [of marriage], the couple seek the consent of their parents, or, if they were dead or missing, of their next of kin or guardian. Such consent, Luther argued, had always been mandated by Scripture (e.g., in the

⁹ The Reformation and the Reform of Marriage: Historical Views and Background for Today's Disputes. Susan Mobley, Concordia University Wisconsin, Susan.Mobley@cuw.edu
<https://issues.cune.edu/the-lgbt-disputes-teaching-and-practice-in-the-church-2/the-reformation-and-the-reform-of-marriage-historical-views-and-background-for-todays-disputes/>

¹⁰ The Lutheran pastor was considered a quasi-public official who was the authorized recorder of births, deaths, and marriages.

Fourth Law of the Decalogue¹¹) as well as by natural law, Roman law, canon law, reason, and equity. The parents played an essential role in the process of marriage formation. They judged the maturity of the couple and the harmony and legality of their prospective relationship. More importantly, their will was to reflect the will of God for the couple. Like the priest and like the prince, the parent had been given authority as God's agent to perform a specific calling in the institution of marriage. Parents, Luther wrote, are "apostles, bishops, and priests to their children." By giving their consent to the couple, parents were giving God's consent.

Second, Luther insisted that the promise to marry be made publicly, in the presence of at least "two good and honorable witnesses." These witnesses could, if necessary, attest to the event of the marriage or to the intent of the parties and could also help instruct the couple of the solemnity and responsibility of their relationship – a function tied to Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

Third, Luther and his followers insisted that, before consummating their marriage, the couple repeat their vows publicly in the church, seek the blessing and instruction of the pastor, and register in the public marriage directory kept in the church. Luther saw the further publicizing of marriage as an invitation for others to aid and support the couple, a warning for them to avoid sexual relations with either party, and a safeguard against false or insincere marriage promises made for the purpose of seducing the other party. Just as the parental consent was to reflect God's will that the couple be married, so the priest's blessing and instruction was to reflect God's will for the marriage – that it remains an indissoluble bond of love and mutual service.

With these requirements of parental consent, witnesses, and church registration and solemnization, Luther deliberately discouraged the secret marriages that the canon law had recognized (though not encouraged). He made marriage "a public institution," advocating the involvement of specific third parties throughout the process of marriage formation.¹²

Throughout Franconia and much of Germany in the 1520s and 1530s, reformers sharply rebuked the Catholic Church's position on marriage in published sermons, pamphlets, and confessional writings. Nürnberg (50 miles from Mistelbach) was a hotbed of such rebuke, especially in the neighboring medieval churches of St. Lorenz and St. Sebaldus.

In 1533, Andreas Oslander, the pastor of St. Lorenz, drafted a decree – *Die Brandenburgisch-Nürnbergische Kirchenordnung* ("The Brandenburg-Nuremberg Church Order") – advocating for the conversion of Franconian churches to Protestantism. This decree was later officially issued by George the Pious, the Margrave.

A few blocks away, St. Sebaldus was the first reformed Protestant church in Germany to begin keeping marriage records in 1534. (Both of these churches still stand in Nürnberg today.)

No more secret marriages, at least for followers of Luther, and... important for us, the beginning of church genealogical record keeping.

Pope Paul III, alarmed at the spread of Lutheranism and its heretical provocations, responded by convoking the Council of Trent in 1545, a synod [formal church assembly] whose purpose was to offer a response to the

¹¹ The "Decalogue" is the Ten Commandments. The "Fourth Law" is the fourth commandment, "Honor thy Father and thy Mother."

¹² The Reformation of Marriage Law in Martin Luther's Germany: Its Significance Then and Now, John Witte, Jr., *Journal of Law and Religion*. Vol. 4, No. 2 (1986), pp. 293-351 (59 pages) Published by: Cambridge University Press

Protestant rebellion.¹³ The Council issued many condemnations of the heresies promulgated by Luther and his fellow Protestants, but they oddly agreed about marriage. On November 11, 1563, the Council issued the *Tametsi Decree*, found in Chapter 1, Session 24, of the Council's proceedings:

"The parish priest shall have a book, which he shall keep carefully by him, in which he shall register the names of the persons married, and of the witnesses, and the day on which, and the place where, the marriage was contracted."¹⁴

The Catholic Church thus required its parishes to keep records of marriages (and baptisms, since a couple had to prove they were baptized in order to marry).

Take that, Lutherans.

The church books of Mistelbach's St. Bartholomäus parish date from 1555, although I suspect the church converted to Protestantism some years before in the 1530s or 40s.¹⁵ Cuntz Dollhopf's marriage of 1546 appears in the book, so the entry was obviously postdated by at least nine years, and it would be highly unlikely that the church would record a Catholic marriage since it was not yet required by the *Tametsi Decree*. We don't know if our Dollhopf ancestors before 1546 were married in a church before a priest, or privately in a home.

Even after the advent of church marriages, the before and after wedding celebrations continued to take place in the home where the couple would live, typically the house of the groom's parents.

Whether married in the home or in the church, by 1500 elaborate public celebrations were certainly the custom in Mistelbach. Marriages were a time for great celebration in a peasant village lacking other forms of entertainment and were often lavish affairs. (In a village of only 30 or 40 families, marriages were infrequent.)



St. Sebaldus Church, Nürnberg, completed in 1275 with improvements made in the 14th, 15th (towers), and 17th centuries. This church, about 50 miles from Mistelbach, was one of the earliest to convert to Protestantism. In 1534 it became the first reformed church to begin keeping marriage records, a boon to all genealogists.

¹³ A *synod* is church terminology for conference. The Synod Council (leaders of the conference) met on and off for 18 years, ending in 1563.

¹⁴ *Tametsi Decree* – *Tametsi* is Latin for the conjunction “although.” As is customary, Latin Rite ecclesiastical documents are often named for the first word of the document, in this case *tametsi*.

¹⁵ Records of the church books of Mistelbach begin as follows: baptism records begin in 1555 (missing 1635-1637), marriage records begin in 1561 (missing 1627-1628, 1637-1647), death records begin in 1572 (missing 1635-1637). It was likely the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) that caused the gap in record keeping.

Well...lavish by peasant standards. Customs varied remarkably from village to village, but all involved a lot of food, alcohol, ostentatious clothing, and, apparently, mischief-making. Weddings lasted two or three days. Merry making took its toll, and the partying often got out of hand.

So out of hand, that in 1692 the Margrave Christian Ernst issued a “Margravian Police Order” attempting to put an end to rowdy, dangerous, and extravagant wedding practices, under the threat of severe fines. The rowdiest of the customs included men racing on horses waving swords and firing pistols.¹⁶

Perhaps the strangest wedding custom, at least to our twenty-first century sensibilities, was that of the *Kopulation* (“consummation or bedding” ceremony):

Sixteenth-century marriages in Germany were typically two-stage affairs. There was first a small ceremony with a handful of witnesses and then a larger event with a church procession and guests from out of town. But the initial event was capped with the consummation of the marriage, so the marriage – actually called the *Kopulation*, which is etymologically related to the more anodyne word “couple” – was in fact consummated *before* the wedding. If the marriage was not consummated, the wedding would not happen. And if the marriage was consummated, the couple were as good as married before the wedding.¹⁷



The Fair Melusine, anonymous 15th-century woodcut of Reymont and Melusina, two German folklore characters, having the consummation blessed and witnessed by the bishop and others. In similar fashion, Martin Luther and his bride Katharina von Bora’s consummation took place before the wedding ceremony in front of witnesses.

We are accustomed to the act of consummation *after* the wedding ceremony – on the wedding night or honeymoon.¹⁸ But in the village of Mistelbach, at least in the nineteenth and prior centuries, the couple had sex on the morning of, *before* the wedding ceremony.¹⁹ What makes this even stranger is that the act had to be witnessed by relatives or close friends.

¹⁶ In contemporary America our wedding customs are no less rowdy or mischievous, really. Bachelor and bachelorette parties are known for rowdiness, and wedding dinners are known for gustatory and alcoholic indulgence. While bachelor and bachelorette parties today are held in the weeks leading up to a wedding, in medieval Germany all of the folderol was packed into two or three consecutive days.

¹⁷ Metaxas, Eric. *Martin Luther* (pp. 343-344). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

¹⁸ Who are we kidding?

¹⁹ OK, who are we kidding? Most couples today live together before marriage.

They must have been *really* close friends.

Many accounts of the era indicate that the wedding guests would accompany the couple to the bedroom – with loud music and obscene gestures – but would not actually hang around to witness, or ensure, the “deflowering,” as was the purpose of the custom. They would simply return to their boisterous partying to drown out the passionate couple, who would join the partying after the deed was done.

It is not clear if the wedding guests stayed in the bedroom to witness the consummation in Mistelbach, but we do know that the bedding ceremony persisted at least until the mid 1800s.

The bedding ceremony for Martin Luther and his bride, the nun Katharina von Bora, was well documented:

[The bedding ceremony] was the normal case, and Luther and Kathie were no exception. So on the evening of June 13 – a Tuesday – his friend Johannes Bugenhagen, who was the Wittenberg parish pastor, conducted the ceremony in the Black Cloister. It was attended by Luther’s closest friend at that time, Justus Jonas, and by Lucas Cranach and his wife, Barbara, with whom Kathie had been living for some time. Another local friend, the jurist John Apel, was there too. He had also married a former nun and was chosen by the university as the official witness to the marriage.



Martin Luther in a painting by his friend Lucas Cranach the Elder, c. 1526. Cranach attended the bedding ceremony of Martin and Katharina and witnessed the consummation.



Katharina von Bora, also painted by Lucas Cranach the Elder c. 1526. Martin and Katharina were married on June 13, 1525, the year before Cranach painted these portraits.

Odder far than the idea that these marriages were consummated before the weddings was the idea that they must be consummated in full view of a witness. So after the small ceremony, the couple were escorted to their bedroom in the cloister, where Jonas did the curious honors, watching the two become one flesh literally and figuratively. He wept to see it, knowing the huge significance of it all on every level. There was often an observation deck above the bed, though this detail seems not to have been observed in

this case. It seems more likely that Jonas simply stood someplace in the room, silently beseeching the Lord of hosts not to abandon him to a coughing fit or sneeze.

From our vantage point, this scenario cubes whatever ideas we have concerning awkwardness, but for those in Luther's day who were not prudes about the facts of life, and who considered the marriage bed not less than holy, and who saw in the physical union of man and woman a living picture of the union between the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, and his Bride, the church, it was a real place and real time where heaven bowed down to kiss the earth, where alpha embraced omega, and where the dewy newness of Eden was rediscovered. And out of this came that which was impossible, the bounteous miracle of life itself. "Yesterday," Jonas wrote to a friend, "I was present and saw the bridegroom on the bridal bed – I could not suppress my tears at the sight."²⁰

It is likely that Luther and von Bora's consummation was witnessed because of its sheer audacity – priest and nun, soon to be man and wife, having sex in defiance of the Pope. Someone had to be there to bear witness.

Historians reckon that the bedding ceremony largely died out in most of western Europe by the late 1700s, but not apparently in Mistelbach. In 1842, Pastor Johann Hübsch of St. Mary Church in Gesees, a village adjoining Mistelbach, described the beginning of the wedding day:

...according to the highest regulations, *copulation must take place in the morning hours when the bride and groom and witnesses are still sober*. The pastor is informed by a messenger of the complete readiness [copulation accomplished], and is presented with a white sackcloth, a rosemary stalk, and a citron [type of citrus fruit]. Under the ringing of the bells, the clergy then approach the wedding house to lead the procession in beautiful order and solemn silence to the church.²¹

Yet again proof that customs died slowly in Mistelbach. It should be noted that our 4th great grandparents Johann Dollhopf and Anna Hagen (the first Dollhopf couple to occupy House #19) were married on October 20, 1774, when she was seven months pregnant – also proof those customs were sometimes broken or ignored. Seems they took all of the fun out of the wedding day: Heinrich Weiß, Pastor of the Mistelbach Church at the time, noted in the church book that the couple "who in disgraceful manner had had intercourse, after the grant of the most gracious government decree, got married in silence on October 20, 1774."

"Got married in silence" described a specific ritual that required the sinners to atone by appearing at the altar rail for all to look down on the shameful couple.

The *Hochzeitszuges* ("wedding procession"), according to Pastor Hübsch, also followed strict rules. After the Kopulation the participants processed from the groom's house to the church in this order:

- 1) the clergy; then follows
- 2) a bachelor as the bride's protector with a sword in his hand decorated with ribbons;
- 3) the bride on the arms of her two bridesmaids with the bridal wreath of flowers [on her head];
- 4) a bride's attendant with a decorated sword in his hand like number two above;
- 5) the groom, accompanied by his closest relatives;
- 6) the male guests; and

²⁰ Oberman, Heiko A. *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*. New York: Image Books, 1992, p. 282; Metaxas, Eric. *Martin Luther* (p. 463). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

²¹ *Das Geseeser Büchlein des Pfarrers J. G. Ad. Hübsch: Ein Heimatbuch zur Orts- und Kirchengeschichte von Gesees 1321-2005*.

7) the female guests in pairs.

The wedding fun happened before and after the bedding and church ceremonies. Some of the partying happened at the bride's house before she was retrieved by the groom and escorted to his house on the morning of the wedding. Plenty of schnapps. Most of the celebrating occurred in the house of the groom's parents, where the couple would reside.²²

Revelry and rowdiness also took place *enroute* – to and from the bride's house – retrieving and escorting her to the groom's house. From the Mistelbach Chronicle:

The groom picks up his bride from her parents' house; on foot if she lives in the village, otherwise with a decorated carriage. The guests are already gathered at the bride's house and are given schnapps as refreshment. When leaving for church, a person is already waiting at the front door to receive from the couple the so-called "bride's piece" a piece of bread in which a piece of money had been put; with this [superstition] all misfortune was to be ushered away by the bride and groom.

During the walk to the church, the bride and groom were accompanied by two virgins and two young men. In front of them rode the *Stützelreiter* and there was a lot of shooting, but this stopped with the establishment of the local *gendarmierie* in 1904. Until 1891 every wedding guest took a bottle of schnapps with him on the way, from which, after the wedding ceremony, every spectator could drink, so that some of these spectators came home very drunk. Mayor Peter Freyberger²³ had the courage to break with this mischief. The bride and groom go straight home after the wedding and sit down behind a table to await the guests. Then follows the banquet,



An elaborately decorated farm wagon retrieved the bride from her home on the morning of the wedding and delivered her to the groom's home – typically where the new couple would reside. The wagon was escorted by sword bearing horsemen called Stützelreiter. This medieval Slavic custom appeared in Mistelbach in the 15th century. In this painting from the Hummelgauer Heimat Bote, the horsemen are sedate, but in practice they often rode wildly through the crowds, pistols drawn and firing to make as boisterous a scene as possible. Sort of like the way we honk horns and make noise today.... On many occasions the authorities attempted to quell this wedding riot.

²² On only two occasions in the 15-generation history of our Mistelbach ancestors did the couple begin married life in bride's house: our 8th great grandparents Hans and Dorothea (Neukam) Dollhopf, who in 1654 moved into the Zeckenmühle (mill) that was owned by Dorothea's father Hans Neukam; and Johann and Anna (Hagen) Dollhopf, who in 1774 moved into House #19, at the time owned by Anna's father Simon.

²³ Mayor Peter Freyberger (1902-1984) was our third cousin twice removed.

during which it happens that one of the guests crawls under the table and steals a shoe from the bride, which then had to be bought back for a ransom. In the past, big weddings lasted three days and two nights, during which the guests were always woken up to a new meal.

Three days of food, alcohol, and revelry...no wonder the authorities were “concerned.”

The rowdiest of traditions appeared to be the above mentioned *Stützelreiter* – armed riders, with sword and or pistol, who retrieved the bride. *Rieter* means “rider,” but the antecedent *Stutz* is somewhat obscure, appearing in literature variously as *Strotzen-*, *Strotzel-*, *Stratzen-*, *Stratzel-*, *Stützel-* and *Stutzer-*. These variations have been translated as “guardian” riders, “hooded” riders, “masked” riders, “unknown” riders, or “uninvited guest” riders. Mistelbach abuts Bohemia (present day Czech Republic) and the *Stutzerreiter* tradition, as well as some other wedding traditions, were of Bohemian, or Slavic, origin. *Stratz* is Slavic for guard, hence “guardian rider.” The Mistelbach region was in part inhabited by Slavs until the 14th century.

Among our peasant weddings, various Slavic customs still remain. For example, the so-called *Strozzeleiter*, *Struzelreiter*, or *Strazelreiter* must ride out to meet the bride, who is getting married in another village, and these bride's “guides” must accompany her to the church. Among the Serbs, Czechs, Kassubians, Vlachs, Estonians and Latvians, the bride is taken on horseback and guarded with weapons [swords and later pistols], because the bride used to be taken by force and also had to be defended against robbers.²⁴

This practice was described in 1842 by Pastor Hübsch of St. Mary's Church in the adjoining village of Gesees:

Around the chamber wagon, some hooded and masked riders, called *Stutzelreiter*, burst, often chasing the crowd apart....

Die Stutzelreiter were young men or boys who were out for mischief. What adolescents, or men acting like adolescents, wouldn't look forward to chasing through the streets waving swords and firing guns?

There were a number of other wedding traditions that apparently got out of hand, as would be likely given that the fun was fueled by alcohol. These ruckuses were described by Pastor Hübsch.²⁵

Das Hennen-Erreiten – “hen riding”:

In former times it was custom that the bridegroom...fetched his bride with several of his guests on horseback. At a certain distance from the bride's house, at a signal given by the bridegroom, 8



Die Stützelreiter with decorated sword fetched the bride from her house and escorted her to the house of the groom, from *Das Geseeser Büchlein des Pfarrers J. G. Ad. Hübsch: Ein Heimatbuch zur Orts- und Kirchengeschichte von Gesees 1321-2005*.

²⁴ "Versuch über die ältere Geschichte des fränkischen Kreises, insbesondere des Fürstenthums Bayreuth," a paper published in 1788 by the High Princely Brandenburg Archive Secretary Joh. Gottlieb Hentze.

²⁵ These local wedding traditions were documented by historian Rüdiger Baureidel in the *Hummelgauer Heimat Bote*, Number 101, September 2013.

to 12 persons would ride on horseback to the bride's place, and whoever arrived there first would receive a hen from the bride as a reward, with this sign of victory he would then chase the bridegroom. The same thing happened at the bride's beckoning as she approached the groom's house, and this time the winner received a rooster from the bride's hand. This custom of "hen riding," which was equally dangerous for horse and rider, was stopped in 1795 as "gross mischief and nonsense"; it was "appalling to watch such a horse race. It is believed that horse and man would break their necks and legs."²⁶

Das Kuchen-Geben und Auswerfen – "cake giving and throwing":

The bride's journey to the groom's home on the carriage is accompanied by "a number of women with the two bridesmaids and bride's guides" [wedding planners]. Among the entire dowry [gifts from the bride's family to the groom] one sees especially a large bed pillow, which is given by the bride's godmother, and the distaff [spinning rod] wrapped with red and blue ribbons...". The bride's guides lift the bride and her escort onto the carriage, and the procession begins to move, accompanied by a large crowd of people, to whom small yeast cakes and pieces of wedding bread are thrown from the carriage.

The bride marks the first step out of her new home with a labor of love by handing a large piece of wedding bread to an old poor woman who has been ordered to the door of the house, and in return receives her thanks and blessing for her intended step.

Braut-Rennen – "bride racing":

Two bridesmaids and several musicians drove a large, decorated carriage in front of the bride's parents' house and took her to her new home to the sound of music. The bridegroom and the two groomsmen awaited the arrival of his future wife in front of his courtyard. The bride's guides had taken off their long shirts, and as soon as the music and the noise of the schoolboys announced the approach of the wedding carriage, both hurried to meet the bride. Whoever arrived first handed her a bouquet of rosemary and offered himself as her protector during the entire wedding celebration. The bride gave this groomsmen a large pewter tankard or a silk neckerchief or a pair of beautifully embroidered suspenders in return. But this was not the greatest reward and the highest prize in the "bridal race."



Cake Giving Ceremony in an 1874 wood engraving by Josef Pushkin. Note the tracht (costumes) and the wide brim hats of the men, typical of the Franconian region. The bride is giving a poor woman a piece of cake.

²⁶ The deeper meaning of this custom is easy to understand: the chicken was considered a symbol of fertility and reproduction, the rooster a symbol of virility

At a given signal from the bride, the two bride handlers raced back to the groom and the winner pinned a sprig of myrtle to his wedding shirt. As a reward, the bridegroom gave him a chicken or, in the case of large peasant weddings, a sheep and a sword decorated with ribbons.

The sword was the sign that the bridegroom entrusted him with the protection of his bride and that he had a special position of honor and special rights at the wedding feast.

The 'bride king' - as the winner of the bridal race was called in Nemmersdorf [neighboring village]- lifted the bride from the carriage and led her to her future husband; he was the first to lead the wedding procession to the church and had his place of honor as protector next to the bride at the banquet; he supervised the serving of drinks and received the wedding gifts; finally, he was entitled to three 'honorary turns' at the wedding dance with the bride, a 'Hopperer', 'Dreher' and 'Schleifer' [Scottish, Gallop, and Walz dances]. "

Nachrücken der Kirchenuhr – “moving of the church clock”:

Mischief makers would climb the church tower to set back the hands of the clock to prolong the eating and drinking at the groom's house before the time of the procession to the church.

Apparently, our ancestors liked to blow off steam, and did so not only at weddings, but also at baptisms and funerals. Over the centuries there was considerable concern over the rowdiness, and at times the local authorities stepped in. Weddings did indeed last for days, and there was much public drunkenness.

The authorities were also upset about ostentatious dress, extravagant spending, gambling, and carousing.

In the early 1600s the local sheriff had to rein in the celebrations, of particular interest to us because our 9th great-grandfather Cuntz Dollhopf (1607-1683) was the local sheriff in those times. Acting on behalf of the Margrave, the sheriff was to enforce the following regulations. From the Chronicle:

In reports of the parish office in Mistelbach [from the early 1600s] reference is made to the police regulation of extravagant clothes, which flew in the face of respectability, and the prohibition of this superfluous expenditure at weddings, baptisms, and funerals.



In 2016 Anne Dollhopf and I ascended the steeple stairs to the bells and clock.

Additional regulations: No more than 42 persons should be invited to a wedding; it should not last longer than one day. Each guest should pay for his meal, not more than 50 old Franconian pennies for lunch and not more than 42 pennies for dinner. Wedding gifts were forbidden. No more than six persons should be invited to a baptism, except the godfather, and no meal should be served, but only confectionery or fruit, or cheese and bread, together with a drink of wine or

beer. Only the godfather should make a small gift. Church *kerwa* and games of chance in which more than half a guilder could be lost, were forbidden.²⁷ The officials had to pay attention to those who constantly caroused and played in the inn.

Unfortunately, these regulations had no lasting effect.

Oh well, I guess our great-grandfather probably tried.²⁸

Did our great grandmothers marry for love? Sadly, probably, mostly, not. At least in the Middle Ages. Marriages were negotiated deals between families, arranged with an eye to the transfer of property – and then the authorities had to approve it.

At least three of our fifteen generations of our grandmothers conceived before marriage, so (maybe) love was involved. Or maybe it was just “oops.”

Did a couple find each other, fall in love, and then ask their parents? I suppose that was possible, but parental and village council permissions, and economic hurdles, were formidable:

German peasants never enjoyed freedom of choice in marriage decisions. Technically, the nobility always had the right to grant or deny a peasant’s request to marry, a right they rarely exercised. The community councils, on the other hand, frequently wielded their power over marriage choice. These village councils prided themselves on knowing everyone in town and in giving preference in marriage decisions to established families. They were cautious about admitting newcomers [women or men from other villages] and felt they had a responsibility to ensure a couple had the means to provide for a family before they could be allowed to wed.²⁹

Often only one son in the family would be able to marry. The farm property, and the right to practice a trade, could only be inherited by one son, and since village councils determined the economic viability of a future couple based on property or trade income, the remaining sons often didn’t marry. They become day laborers without property, or soldiers, or they left the village to marry into another family if that was possible:

Often the sons of farmers and craftsmen alike waited until the death or retirement of their father (or father-in-law), at which time getting approval for marriage for one of the sons was often just a formality. This system worked well if you were the oldest son, or if your future father-in-law was near retirement age when you wanted to marry. For those who were second sons, or who were too poor to wed, or who did not have the potential resources to support a family, it was expected that they would remain single and moderately celibate. The common belief among those in power was that allowing the poor to marry was a threat to the viability of the community at large.³⁰

²⁷ A *kerwa* is an annual church fair celebrating the founding of the church.

²⁸ I don’t know the precise dates when these laws went into effect, or when they were dropped. We know that our great grandfather served as sheriff for at least two terms in 1662 and 1663, and almost certainly more. He undoubtedly knew of the rowdiness. Whether or not he had a direct hand in trying to stop it is not known. Maybe he didn’t want to stop it!

²⁹ Thomas Robisheaux, *Rural Society and the Search for Order in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 34–5. Marriage Laws In Mistelbach/Bavaria;
https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Bavarian_Marriage_Customs,_Laws,_and_Trends_of_Illegitimacy

³⁰ Thomas Robisheaux, *Ibid.* pp, 34-5.

In Bavaria and surrounding regions, including Mistelbach, marriage laws were passed in 1578 requiring the local village council to give permission for marriages. A 1780 law required pastors to pay a fine of 100 guilders if they married a couple without government permission.³¹ If a couple fled the village to get married, they lost all citizenship rights.



Costume from the nearby Franconian village of Pittersdorf. Such were the clothes worn on special occasions like weddings, baptisms, and funerals. This picture is from the Hummelgauer Heimat Bote, a regional history and culture magazine.

Feudalism waned in the 1700s and perhaps couples were indeed beginning to marry without council approval. This would be evident given that in 1780 they had to enact a law enforcing council approval for marriage.

Unfortunately, the Mistelbach church records do not reveal if our newlywed grandparents were actually in love. However, in 15 generations of Dollhopfs in Mistelbach there was never an instance of divorce, although to be fair, divorce was uncommon in peasant villages – and made nearly impossible by the Church. The exigencies of day-to-day and hand-to-mouth survival kept couples together.

However, our grandparents in the 1600s – during and in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War – married multiple times. Cuntz Dollhopf, our 9th great grandfather, who married four times, was 11 years old when the War started in 1618. The War apparently didn't affect Mistelbach much until 1632, but thereafter with devastating consequences. Mistelbach was largely destroyed on several occasions. Many families fled, and it took decades for Mistelbach to recover.

³¹ Mistelbach Chronicle.

He married, for the first time, a woman whose name we don't know in 1627. She was the mother of our 6th great grandfather. She died around the age of 29, probably from war violence or the plague, we don't know for sure. Cuntz married *three* more times, each time surviving the death of his then wife. His four wives had been married a combined eight times; the last two three times each. Mistelbach lost a third to a half of its population during those war years, explaining in part the reason for multiple remarriages.

Day-to-day survival depended on having *both* a woman and a man working together – the woman essentially taking care of the house, the man the fields and/or a trade. Living at subsistence levels required teamwork.

Cuntz was a busy man. He was a tailor, a farmer, got married four times, purchased land and built a new house, was a church warden, and held the village job of *vogt* [vöt]. A vogt was the local *advocatus* (“advocate”) – a sort of sheriff or mayor, appointed by the margrave – responsible for administering the margrave’s laws and regulations. So perhaps Cuntz was the final arbiter of marriage. In later years a town council served in this capacity, and it is likely that some of our Dollhopf grandfathers were council members. Because vogts had to collect the taxes, we can assume they were probably not so popular.

I wonder... as vogt or sheriff, did Cuntz get to decide for himself whom he could marry?

Two of our Dollhopf grandfathers served as vogts – Cuntz, and our 3rd great-grandfather Eberhard (1789-1843). Four more served as *Gotteshaus-Meister* (“God’s house,” or church, “master,” or warden): 12th great grandfather Cuntz (1498-1570), 10th great Cuntz (1581-1635), 9th great Cuntz (1607-1683), and 6th great Conrad 1693-1750). Again, they were not elected to these offices; they were appointed by the margrave. Perhaps these church managers also had responsibility for approving marriages.

By the 1800s local governments exercised even tighter controls over marriage in an attempt to curb population growth in the face of intense poverty and famine. Couples had to prove they had the necessary financial wherewithal (and of course upstanding morals) before the government granted them permission to marry.

This is why our 2nd great grandparents Johann and Margarethe could not marry in the 1850s despite already having had four children. Johann, their oldest child, was born in 1852, and they did not marry until 1856, at which time the couple’s parents stepped forward to sponsor them financially. In addition, they had to produce documents like a report card to demonstrate their moral character. Such onerous marriage laws, of course, were among the reasons millions of Germans immigrated to America in the mid 1800s.

It is difficult for us today to imagine marrying someone whom we did not love or did not choose to marry. But then again, everything else in a peasant’s life was controlled by the noble or town council, including his land, his buildings, his trade, his earnings, and his time (he was required to work the noble’s land before he worked his own). Not that it was just, it was just the norm.

Were the Dollhopf women *happy*?

I guess we’ll never know. Given their subjugated status – not to mention the exigencies of poverty, disease, famine, war, sex prohibitions, the dangers of childbirth – we could easily deduce that they led a miserable life. But all is relative; this is all they knew.

Nevertheless, medieval marriages often developed into close and loving relationships. Fifteenth-century preacher Bernardine of Siena told the male members of his congregation that...

“...the most beautiful and most useful thing in a house” was “to have a beautiful, tall wife, who is wise, virtuous, temperate, and such as to bear children.... When the woman sees aught to be done, she stands in readiness. If she is with child, she suffers discomfort in her condition, she suffers in bringing forth her children, she endures toil in caring for them, in teaching and training

them, and tires herself as well in looking to the comfort of her husband when he is in any need whatsoever, or in sickness.”³²

In fact, according to Bernardine, a man without a wife was in a bad way. Who was to look after his house and goods?

The mice and sparrows ate his grain, the jars in which he stored oil leaked and broke, the hoops of the wine casks burst, the wine turned to vinegar or became musty. He slept “in a ditch”—in the indentation made by his body, since the bed was never shaken up and smoothed—and the sheet was never changed until it fell apart from age.

In like manner, in the room where he eats, on the floor lie the rinds of melons, bones, refuse, leaves of lettuce, all left there without ever being swept up. The cloth remained on the table until it became moldy. The platters he washes as little as he can, and the dog licks and cleans them; the earthen pots are all greasy, go, look in what condition they are! Do you know how he lives? Like a beast.³³

Some things never change.

Did they marry for love? Probably not, but many likely found love:

The greatest of medieval theologians, Thomas Aquinas, wrote that “copulation even among the animals creates a sweet society,” and that “a man loves his wife principally by reason of the carnal meeting.” Between husband and wife “maximum friendship” developed, based on delight in the sexual act, in creating a household together, and in the response of one virtuous person to another. His contemporary and friend Saint Bonaventure wrote, “In marriage... there is mutual love and therefore mutual zeal, and therefore singleness.... For there is something miraculous in a man finding in one woman a pleasingness, pleasingness which he can never find in another.” If people did not marry for love, nevertheless they often found love in marriage.³⁴

All’s well that ends well.³⁵

Next in the series on Dollhopf women: Sex and sexuality.

Mark R. Dollhopf
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³² Gies, Joseph; Gies, Frances. *Women in the Middle Ages (Medieval Life)* (p. 34). HarperCollins e-books. Kindle Edition.

³³ Gies, Joseph and Frances, *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁴ Gies, Joseph and Frances, *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁵ “All’s well that ends well,” title of a Shakespeare play, means a difficult situation that ends in a good result. Shakespeare published the play in 1623.