Dollhopf

600 Years in the Baking

Dollhopf Women

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

Clothing

What did our grandmother's wear?

They did *not* wear *dirndls* – contrary to our popular notions of buxom beer stein juggling Octoberfest maidens. And a display of cleavage would have caused major disruption in the village. Nor did our grandfather's wear *lederhosen*.

Dirndls and lederhosen are from the Alps, and even though Mistelbach is in Bavaria, it is nowhere near the Alps. Mistelbach is in Oberfranken ("Upper Franconia"), the northern most "county" of Bavaria, a distinct cultural region about 300 miles north of the Alps.

Over the centuries peasant dress did not much change. It was simple and utilitarian. On festive occasions however, like baptisms, weddings, and funerals, it could be elaborate, *very* elaborate. Their festive costume, known as *tracht*, signaled status and wealth, much as it does today – although status and wealth was relative given that they were poor peasants.

They certainly did not have a closet full of clothes. Our peasant grandmothers had one change of clothes, one to wear while the other was being washed.

The 1858 inventory of the Dollhopf house #19 showed that, at the time of his death, our great-great-grandfather Johann had *one* shirt and *one* pair of pants in the the closet. Presumably he was buried in his other shirt and pants – his tracht. We don't know what our great-great-grandmother had in her closet, but given their poverty it was similarly barren.

***Peasant Woman with Two Jugs**, engraving by Barthel Beham, 1524. Period engraving showing the simplicity of dress. A peasant women had two changes of clothing – one that she wore while she washed the other.*

The first layer of a peasant woman's clothing was a shift that reached below the knees, over which one wore a long tunic; and over that a long shirt. Hose, if worn, went up to the knees. Her loose fitting clothes were secured with a narrow belt or rope, or the ties of an apron. The belt might have held a pouch for money, knives, utensils, etc.

When it was cold, as it was most of the time in northern Europe, they wore a mantle – a one piece woolen shawl with a center slit that fit over the head. Women *always* wore head scarves because a display of hair was considered overtly sexual.

From the Fränkische Schweiz-Museum, a photo of a peasant woman in daily garb.

Clothes were typically washed once a week in a stream or pond, but let's face it, they were always filthy from strenuous dawn to dusk work in the stable, the fields, and the kitchen.

No such thing as pajamas. Women slept in the nude, or if it was cold, in a shift.

Rarely, if *ever*, did she buy new clothes. She made her own or acquired them second-hand. Clothes were stained, ripped, and shredded from hard labor, patched and sewn as necessary. The village indeed had tailors, but they were likely more often used for the native costumes. One always had to scrimp.

Almost all of the women in Mistelbach spun their own thread and weaved their own cloth. In the 1858 inventory of the Dollhopf house there was indeed a spinning wheel on the third floor amid stacks of flax.

> One of a medieval woman's most time-consuming and onerous activities was making thread (spinning) and weaving it into cloth. Girls in the Middle Ages began helping with this task by at least the age of seven and did not stop until they died or their hands were so crippled from arthritis (or other diseases or injuries) that they were unable to manipulate the tools. In the early Middle Ages, when weaving was done on an upright loom, it could be a source of supplemental income for peasant families. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries weaving for trade had become more of an urban craft, and most peasant weaving was done for private consumption. Producing clothes in medieval Europe began with the basics: gathering the raw materials. Flax plants (for linen) or wool from sheep was generally the base for thread, although many kinds of hair and fibers could be spun. First, the material was cleaned and combed to remove all dirt, and unusable fibers were removed to make the remaining fibers run parallel, which made it easier to spin and led to better cloth. The spinner attached one end of a fiber to the top of a spindle, a stick about one foot long with a weight at the bottom. Then she started spinning the spindle, which twisted the fibers together, and the weight pulled them into thread.
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> Later in the Middle Ages a fairly prosperous peasant might have a spinning wheel, which allowed more thread to be spun with less effort, but it was always a luxury item. Once the thread was spun, it was made into cloth on a loom. After it was woven, fabric had to be finished, with the process varying depending on the type of fabric. If the cloth were dyed, and that worn by most

***The Dollhopf family** c. 1923. This is one of the oldest known photographs of the Dollhopf family, and is a great illustration of women's clothing. This photo was taken in the barn behind house #19, currently occupied by Bernd Hammon, son of Margarethe Dollhopf, the little girl in the photograph. Labeled:* 1 ***Johann Konrad Dollhopf** (1856-1947, age at death, 90), brother of our great-grandfather John Dollhopf. "A big, strong, man who was singing all the time," according to his grandson, Hans Dollhopf. In addition to farming he was the owner of the sandstone quarry.* 2 ***Margareta Hartung Dollhopf** (1868-?) Johann Konrad's third wife (his first two wives predeceased him).* 3 ***Adam Dollhopf** (1882-1959, 76). Farmer and quarryman, son of Johann Konrad and first cousin of our grandfather Edward Dollhopf. Adam inherited house #19 and the farm on March 20, 1923; he was likely the owner when this picture was taken.* 4 ***Barbara Schiller Dollhopf** (1894-1978, 84) Adam's wife and mother of the three children in the photo. "Outgoing, hilarious, gregarious." For a complete description of all of the people in the photograh, see page 10 of Blog 6: The Dollhopf House.*

medieval peasants was not, the dyes were based on natural materials. These dyes faded in the sun, so even dyed peasant clothes often looked washed out. Only the richest people could afford to redye their clothing. Once the cloth itself was produced, it had to be made into clothes. The tools used in this process involved a substantial investment: shears, needles, and some form of pin or fastener to hold pieces of cloth together. Metal needles were valuable goods. In many cases peasant clothing was designed to require little sewing, but darning and other repairs were

> needed during the long lifetime of a garment. Clothes were too valuable to be discarded just because they were torn.[1]

Given that a women's daily wear was drab and never varied (because they only had one change of clothes), it is perhaps not surprising that dress for religious holidays and festive events was extravagant – overly extravagant according to some pastors and village elders.

Over the centuries, church and town officials were concerned about ostentatious clothing worn by women at weddings and similarly festive occasions. This concern was not about how revealing the clothing might have been, but rather its flashiness. Indeed, at times there were prohibitions in Mistelbach concerning extravagant dress.

ThIs no doubt due to the fact that a women's beauty was ***not*** defined by her physical features, but rather her ceremonial garb.

> Outside of marriage, virginity and purity were prized, and sexuality was limited to small displays of beauty, such as embroidered hair coverings or fine clothes. Chastity removed the possibility for any kind of sexual identity as would be seen in the 21st century.
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> A woman's [ceremonial] clothing was particularly important in attracting male attention for the intention of marriage. In fact, a beautiful woman in poor clothing would go generally unnoticed while a much less attractive woman in fine clothing would receive far more male attention, although modesty was throughout considered to be her greatest triumph.[2]

What a woman wore, and to a lesser extent what men wore, is a complicated subject.

> The *tracht* ("costume") is an expression of village community and a common life – in this order. The focus is not on the wearer, rather the clothing serves to present property and wealth. The more fabric was used in the costume, the more buttons on the vests, the richer the wearer. In some regions the buttons on the vest were placed so close together that they hardly had any space; the skirts were so deeply pleated that they reached an almost unreasonable weight. The form of the costume naturally had financial limits, which made the social stratification of the population clear. It was an unwritten law that one was not allowed to cross the boundaries of the individual village social classes, even if the financial basis was given to buy an elaborate costume.[3]

Following is a description of the local costume by Pastor Hübsch of St. Mary's Church in the neighboring village of Gesess, written in 1842 [my comments in brackets]:

> The old Hummel costume was as follows: The men's jackets are short with the waist pushed up and lined with green on the inside. In addition to the short coat, each had a longer one of the same or finer cloth. Both were not buttoned on top of each other, but only crocheted together with hooks. Instead of vests they wear breast patches [a formal waistcoat with buttons, more substantial than an informal vest] otherwise scarlet, now of dark green cloth, trimmed with yellow cords, and embroidered with little yellow, red, and blue flowers [embroidery varied from village to village]. Over the waistcoat go wide, black leather suspenders, which are looped several times in the front, from which hang the short, black, buckskin trousers on brass hooks, which are

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[1] Hans-Werner Goetz, *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century*, translated by Albert Wimmer, edited by Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993). https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/farmers-and-peasants-clothes-and-hygiene.

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_female_sexuality#cite_note-wars-3

[3] https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tracht_(Kleidung)

tied together at the knees over the white stockings. Around the neck there used to be a simple velvet ribbon, but now it is a black, silk scarf with dark red stripes woven around the edges in young people. On the head, however, sits a broad black hat with a hanging brim that is turned up here and there, or a high-standing green velvet and richly trimmed cap. The women wear a pleated black skirt with a light blue ribbon at the bottom, a black leather belt richly decorated with metal plates, a black jacket and a hood embroidered with silk and tinsel gold, with a black or red headscarf over it. The virgins adorn their bonnets with dark red, silk ribbons that are artificially twisted and wear a colorful wreath. The traditional costume is completed by a carefully made apron, which is made of black silk for women, colorful or white and embroidered for girls.

Costume from the nearby Franconian village of Pittersdorf, which would have only subtle differences from the costume of Mistelbach. Such were the clothes worn on special occasions like weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Note the ridiculous number of buttons on the jacket, indicative of relative wealth. This picture is from the Hummelgauer Heimat Bote, a regional history and culture magazine.

All of the women in Mistelbach were peasants, so I imagine that their tracht would be similar, but I dare not make assumptions. The costume carried many meanings – clothing spoke volumes about you, perhaps even more so than in our current world of hyperfashion. The costume revealed one's:

- *region* – tracht was distinct from village to village.
- *social class* – within a village.
- *economic circumstances* – rich, poor, and in between.

- *civil status* – e.g., married, unmarried, in mourning, available, etc. The colors used in aprons, headgear, garters, breast scarf, bodice, and sleeves indicated as follows: girls and unmarried young women (red); married young women (green); married older women (purple); women in mourning, widows (black).
- *state of mourning* – full (black, "full" morning lasted for two years), half (gray or white, another year or so), quarter mourning (lighter yet), joyful time.
- *religious occasions* – Lord's Supper, Sunday church attendance, ordinary or Holy Days, wedding, communion, confirmation, etc.[4]

It shouldn't surprise anyone today that clothes would make such a statement. Some things, apparently, never change.

Underwear

What did our grandmothers wear underneath their shifts?

Nothing.

No underwear – pants or bra. It was taboo for women to wear underpants, or briefs, of any sort, whence the ancient idiom that the person who is in charge "wears the pants in the family." Men wore pants, not women. Wearing pants meant having authority and control over those in the household. If a woman did wear pants, even underpants, she was the object of scorn and derision, and was suspected of usurping a man's authority. The husbands would be mightily upset.

Historians generally agree that briefs and bras were not common until after the First World War, and in rural areas such as Mistelbach even later.

> Through most of history, the undergarment European women wore was a plain, short-sleeved affair of soft linen (not cotton!) that did look like a nightshirt and which fell to between the knees and the ankles—possibly gathered with stitching and/or a drawstring under the breasts to provide a little support. In English it was called a smock (early Middle Ages), a shift (Middle Ages through 18th century), or a chemise or "shimmy" (in the 19th century, adopted from the French). If the woman wore a corset, it went on over the shift so that the wearer's skin wasn't chafed from the hard bones of the corset.[5]

There is archeological evidence that a very few women of the upper classes *might* have worn briefs, notably of linen or silk, probably for warmth or decoration.[6] Noble women could flaunt taboos and social conventions against wearing pants; peasant women could not.

Besides, peasant women would not be able to afford fine linen or silk, and rough cloth made of flax or wool would have been darn uncomfortable.

Not wearing underpants had its advantages. It allowed for easy "relief" in the fields – or anywhere, for that matter. The 18th century illustration on the next page portrays people relieving themselves…wherever.

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[4] Ibid,

[5] Alleyn, Susanne. Medieval Underpants and Other Blunders: A Writer's (& Editor's) Guide to Keeping Historical Fiction Free of Common Anachronisms, Errors, & Myths [Third Edition] (pp. 9-10). Spyderwort Press. Kindle Edition.

[6] See https://www.historyextra.com/period/medieval/medieval-underwear-bras-pants-and-lingerie-in-the-middle-ages/ about excavations from the Lengberg Castle of East Tyrol, Austria.

For women, everything of interest was hidden beneath long skirts, so why bother wearing underpants? With long skirts women could squat in the fields without fear of being immodest.

If not in the fields, then in the yard surrounding the house – either in the animal stable or in a privy. There was no such thing as a "bathroom" in the house. The Dollhopf privy was located outside the front door next to the pile of animal dung…in the "front yard!" Imagine!

Human dung was gathered with animal dung and stacked in front of the house to be transferred to the fields in carts. "Waste" not, want not.

The Dollhopf house in Mistelbach did not have indoor plumbing until the 1970s.

The John Dollhopf house on Spring Hill in Pittsburgh never had a Dollhopf john. Hee, hee. LaVerne Dollhopf recounted that as a young girl in the 1930s she did not like visiting her grandparents because of the outhouse.[7] Scary indeed.

In the cities people collected "night soil" in chamber pots that were emptied in the morning – often into the street. In rural areas peasants didn't bother. In the 1858 inventory there was no mention of a chamber pot. And they inventoried *everything* down to the belts in the closet and the soup spoons in the cupboard. Curiously, the inventory did include a *Schränzlein*, a basket specifically for carrying dung. A *basket*? Yuck!

"Sympathy, or A Family On A Journey Laying The Dust" *by Thomas Rowlandson, London, 1784. In the days before toilets and restrooms, men and women (as well as dogs and horses as shown!) relieved themselves (known as "laying dust") indiscriminately in the most convenient places.*

The Dollhopf livestock lived inside the house in a room or stable next to the living area on the first floor. You simply opened the door and "went" where the animals "went." Again, it should be noted that peasants who lived so close to animals were not squeamish or repulsed by biological "functions" – animal or human (including sex).

Sadly, adults and children often died of dysentery, an infection of the intestines caused by bacteria or parasites. Symptoms included severe diarrhea, fever, cramping, and dehydration. Untreated it could be fatal, as it often was before the invention of antibiotics.

There were many folk remedies to treat dysentery such as "…precisely-cut bramble roots, reciting Psalm 56 three times and the 'Our Father' nine times, fasting, resting in a soft bed, plus a few other ingredients."[8] Some manner of tea infused with herbs found in the woods or garden was often taken, in which case the additional liquids, not the herbs, would ease the symptoms.

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[7] It is not clear whether the house at 22 Iona Street on Spring Hill ever had indoor plumbing. Spring Hill was so named because of its many springs, and residents frequented the many public fountains including a well-known watering hole on Itin Street, a few blocks from the Dollhopf house.

[8] Burfield, Brian, The Invisible Enemy; https://www.jstor.org/stable/48578021

Dysentery is caused by fecal contamination – and a lack of knowledge about hand washing and the spread of germs. Nearly *a fifth* of the adults and children in the late 18th to early 19th century Dollhopf households died from dysentery.[9] Young children were especially vulnerable.

House #19 c.1910, one of the oldest known photographs of the house. This is the front view. The little wood shed attached to the corner of the building at left is the privy. In front of the privy is a huge pile of dung, in front of the pile of dung is the cart used to haul the dung to the fields. Standing in front is our great-grandfather's brother ***Johann Konrad Dollhopf*** *(1856-1947) and his third wife* ***Margarethe Hartung*** *(1868-?). Note her filthy clothes. The stable for their livestock was located in the house on the left behind the privy wall.*

It was a time of extreme poverty, crowded living conditions, and poor sanitation.

And no running water.

You would think that women would wear pants because of menstruation, but this was not the case:

[9] See blogs on grandmother Kunigunde Seuffert (1722-1798) and following. Kunigunde, who died of dysentery in 1798, had two children who died very young, and two grandchildren who also died as infants. Their living conditions were crowded – house #55 (before the family moved to house #19), was small even by Mistelbach standards.

> An elegant woman prone to irregular heavy visits…as the time of her period approached, wore some kind of padded loincloth or folded strip of absorbent cloth, possibly pinned front and back to her corset [or shift] like a pre-1980s Kotex…. The expression "on the rag," after all, was once quite literal.
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> A peasant, on the other hand, without expensive clothing to protect, may not have done anything about her period except to hope that her shift and dark-colored skirt would mostly conceal the stains that might appear as she went about her daily work, much of which was outdoors anyway.
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> Most country folk, living literally side by side with their farm animals, were pretty down-to-earth about such matters until the mid-19th century began to give us plumbing, concepts of sanitation and finicky hygiene for all, and the ability to circulate such new ideas to the masses. But the artwork and pantalettes of the early 19th century do suggest that going commando was the usual custom for even well-dressed women.[10]

Historians posit that peasant women experienced infrequent menstruation, minimizing the headaches and messiness. Periods were less frequent because of serial pregnancies,[11] prolonged breast feeding (common until the child was two to three years of age), poor nutrition, strenuous physical labor, and lack of medical care.

> …married women didn't often have periods; they were usually pregnant or nursing and might have had only one or two periods during any twelve-month stretch…. Poor women, on the other hand, if sufficiently malnourished, would often cease having periods at all.[12]

And when they did have periods… there were no analgesics or sedatives to treat headaches or cramping. Arghh.

Mary Phelps Jacob (also known as Caresse Crosby) patented the most frequently referenced modern brassiere in 1914, after making one from two handkerchiefs to wear under an evening dress. Although her design was not a huge commercial success, the "bra" became established as an essential underpinning after 1917. https://artsandculture.google.com/story/strapped-in-the-origins-and-evolution-of-the-bra-the-museum-at-fit/tgWR37Ef4_X7JA?hl=en

Did our grandmothers wear bras?

Here again, no.

At least not as we know them. Unless you were exceptionally large, you likely did not wear any article of clothing for support, especially under many layers of clothes. Peasant women were buttoned up all the time, modest in all things including cleavage. If support was needed, peasant women likely adopted the custom of the ancient Romans – cloth strips or "breast bands" tied around the chest to flatten the breasts and hold them in place against the chest.

[10] Alleyn, Susanne. Medieval Underpants and Other Blunders: A Writer's (& Editor's) Guide to Keeping Historical Fiction Free of Common Anachronisms, Errors, & Myths [Third Edition] (p. 17). Spyderwort Press. Kindle Edition.
[11] Remember, even though many of our grandmothers had relatively few children, it was likely that 30% or more of pregnancies resulted in miscarriages.
[12] Alleyn, Susanne; Ibid., p. 16.

There is evidence that upper class women used "breast bags," or cups of cloth tied to one's shirt to hold and perhaps elevate them, as would a corset or girdle. Upper class women emphasized their cleavage – again flaunting social convention – using corsets and girdles to bind the waist while lifting the breasts.

But peasant women could not afford corsets or girdles, and exposing cleavage would have caused considerable alarm in the village. Nor would work in the fields be possible wearing a corset!

There are some written medieval sources on possible female breast support, but they are rather vague on the topic. Henri de Mondeville, surgeon to Philip the Fair of France and his successor Louis X, wrote in his *Cyrurgia* in 1312–20: "Some women… insert two bags in their dresses, adjusted to the breasts, fitting tight, and they put them [the breasts] into them [the bags] every morning and fasten them when possible, with a matching band."[13]

The Coronation of the Winner *mosaic (the so-called "Bikini mosaic"), 4th century AD, discovered in the Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily. In ancient Rome women wore breast bands and a type of pants during sporting events. In the Middle Ages, in Central Europe, this would have been unheard of. There were no bikini sports in Mistelbach.*

The modern bra, essentially two handkerchiefs sewn together, was invented and patented in 1914 by Mary Phelps Jacob, although there were numerous "inventions" dating from the mid 1800s that typically included back and front panels with sewn-in cups. The 1914 Jacob invention was the first known to have only a simple strap in the back and straps over the shoulders. Bras did not gain widespread acceptance until after WWI, and in a remote rural region such as Mistelbach not until 1960's or 70's.[14]

As was described above, a woman was "sexy" because of her hair and elaborately adorned costume – certainly not because of her lingerie. Contrary to our modern notions, her figure – legs, waist, hips, and breasts – was not an object of sexual attraction. This is hard for us to imagine today.

Her eiaborately embroided shirts and head scarves, her heavily pleated and layered skirts, her elaborately decorated aprons, her intricately braided hair – these were the expressions of her sexuality.

Her underwear? Commando.

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[13] "Medieval underwear: bras, pants and lingerie in the Middle Ages:" https://www.historyextra.com/period/medieval/medieval-underwear-bras-pants-and-lingerie-in-the-middle-ages/
[14] "Strapped In: The Origins and Evolution of the Bra:" https://artsandculture.google.com/story/strapped-in-the-origins-and-evolution-of-the-bra-the-museum-at-fit/tgWR37Ef4_X7JA?hl=en

Next in the series on Dollhopf women: Our 15th **Great-grandmother, Jane Doe (we don't know her name).**

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