

TWO MARGARETHAS PLEASE

THE YOUNGER MARGARETHA: MARGARETHA DIEDEL

Margaretha Diedel was born in Germersreuth, a village on the outskirts of Münchberg as the eldest child of Cunradt Diedel also Dietel and Margaretha Bencker. She was baptised on February 2nd, 1654 in Münchberg.

Times were bad. The Thirty Year War (1618 - 1648) had left the region of Münchberg in shambles and the population reeling. Margaretha was born six years after the end of the war. Maybe lack of perspective forced Margaretha's parents to relocate to Rainsreuth, a village in the vicinity of Zell between 1654 and 1655, shortly after her birth.

Margaretha spent the first years of her life in Rainsreuth. Between the age of eight or twelve years, the family moved again, this time to Möldenreuth, another hamlet close to Zell.

On October 23rd, 1666, at the age of 23, Margaretha married Laurentius Engelhardt, the son of Andreas and Elisabeth Engelhardt in Himmelkron, Bavaria. The couple lived in Kössler, a small hamlet outside of Himmelkron made up of two or three farms. Margareth's husband Laurentius was a farmer who had taken over the Kössler farm from his parents Andreas and Elisabeth Engelhardt together with his older brother Johannes. As the farm probably could not feed two families, Laurentius also worked as a day labourer.

The couple had ten children, seven boys and three girls. As it happened often in those times, five of their children died at a young age. Margaretha herself died on December 31st, 1704 at the age of 50. She was buried in the early days of January 1705 in Himmelkron. Her youngest child Johann Peter, my ancestor, was ten at the time of her death.

THE OLDER MARGARETHA: MARGARETHA BENCKER

Margaretha's mother was Margaretha Bencker [Bäncker, Benker], daughter of Friedrich Bencker in Querenbach and Margaretha Rüdel, grand-daughter of Hans Rüdel.

Margaretha Bencker was born during the 30-year war, around 1628 - a birth record does not exist. Her father probably died, when she was small, as she is mentioned as the step-daughter of Hannes Popp or Poppen from Lösten in her marriage entry. She probably grew up on the Schnakenhof, near Kleinlosniz in the vicinity of Zell.

Margaretha Bencker married Cunradt Dietel, a farmer, on November 9th, 1652, in Germersreuth, where the younger Margaretha, Margaretha Diedel was born.

Cunradt Dietel was the son of Fritz Dietel and his wife Anna. He was probably born around 1631, deducted from his age at death. Cunradt was also known as Fritzen's Dietel. Back in those times, the father's name was often used in connection with the son's name, to distinguish the various family lines. Cunradt's father died in Rainsreuth in 1664. He was probably born around 1568.

After Margaretha's birth, the couple moved to Rainsreuth, where Cunradt's father lived and Margaretha Dietel's four brothers were baptised. Later the family moved to Mödlenreuth, where at least two of Margaretha's three sisters were born and got married. Margaretha died exactly six years before her daughter on December 31st, 1698 in Mödlenreuth. She was seventy years old. Cunradt died a year earlier, on January 30th, 1697.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Margaretha Bencker was born during the Thirty Year War, her daughter Margaretha Dietel six years after the peace treaty. Both women lived in times of destruction, hardship and poverty. Karl Dietel, a local historian für Münchberg and the Münchberg area describes the Situation back then:

Shortly before the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, on March 8, 1617, a major fire completely destroyed 48 houses, the rectory and both Diakonatsgebäude in the town of Münchberg. Shortly after the fire, the 30-year war began, leaving the town inhabitants no time to recover from this calamity. Even though the Principality of Bayreuth and Münchberg were spared during the first years of the war by a declaration of neutrality by Margrave Christian, foreign troops soon passed through the area, disregarding the declaration of neutrality and demanding to be quartered in the city several times. In order to protect the population from encroachments, 200 inhabitants from a military association (committee).

On April 1, 1631, there was another fire disaster in Münchhausen, this time burning down the church, the rectory, the school, the town hall, 96 private houses and 17 barns. In the same year, the declaration of neutrality was abolished by Margrave Christian and Bayreuth entered the war on the part of the Swedes. As a result, various conflict parties moved through the heavily destroyed Münchberg. The place suffered equally from opponents and allies alike. Again and again reports of robbery, murder and billeting were reported. Especially the year 1633 was considered as a year of horror, when large parts of the principality were controlled by imperial troops. To make matters worse, the plague killed 330 inhabitants of the parish.

In 1635 there was a short period of rest. Margrave Christian joined the peace of Prague and the alliance with the Swedes was terminated. In a list compiled by the Hauptmannschaft Hof dating September 1635, Münchberg lists 40 widows with 61 children, 56 orphans, 98 burnt down houses and 72 abandoned farms, houses and farmsteads. In 1636 the war flared up again with even more billeting, looting and other atrocities.

In 1648 the Thirty Years' War finally ended with the Peace of Westphalia. The contractual provision the treaty obliged the Principality of Bayreuth to pay 37,000 Reichstaler to the Swedes. For Münchberg, this meant that five Reichstaler had to be paid per 100 guilders of taxable wealth. This payback lead to even more hardship in Münchberg, as large parts of the city were still in ruins due to the two devastating fires. The city took decades to recover from war damage, city fires and plague. On October 27, 1679 the government issued an edict to promote reconstruction with tax breaks and reduced prices for building materials to alleviate the hardship and trigger economic growth.

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