

## History of the "Schöffersstadt" Gernsheim

Already during the first two centuries AD, a roman castle with a proper camp village [canabae legionis, victus] had been existing in Gernsheim. It was clearly proven by archeological diggings in the cities' southern parts. Artifacts from Roman as well as other local historical epochs of Schöffersstadt Gernsheim can be seen in museum [Schöffershaus].

On Schöffersplatz there was a medieval water-castle of Electoral Mainz. Very likely right next to it was a carolingian royal court in which 852 a document as following stated was issued. Gernsheim's first written proof was signed in Geruneshaim on June 23, 852 by King Ludwig II. This charter „Vorschrift über die Lorscher Reichsunmittelbarkeit und Freiheit“ of the king was not issued for, but written in the city: “Unter glücklichem Sterne, geschehen in Geruneshaim [Gernsheim] im Namen Gottes. Amen.“ That means it happened there under auspicious circumstances in the name of God.

By the document issued December 22, 1356 Gernsheim received its town charter by German Emperor Karl IV. The question “Why the city was chartered” answered Dr. Klaus Hansel as follows: "There was easy money, and the trade could flourish. Gernsheim was like a gate to the closed Mainz held between the Rhine with a customs facilities and the important road [Bergstraße]." The municipal rights accompanying market privileges and hardworking and diligent citizens soon turned Gernsheim's under rule of Electoral Mainz into a prosperous city.

In February 1689 Gernsheim along other towns in the region was hit by the cruel fate of the so called war of the palatian succession. The city was destroyed by fire under the French General Ezéchiél de Mélaç. All but few houses were burned to ashes. The Year 1689 was so dreadful that it has been called “annus feralis” [lat. Year of Dreads] in the death-register of the catholic parish Gernsheim.

Although being spared by direct military actions of the First World War, the city was devastated during last two weeks of World War II. March 25 to 26, 1945 allied artillery destroyed the inner city causing death to 16 civilian.

### Cultural-historical walk through Gernsheim

We begin our walk along the pier and it's jewel at the extreme tip. “Hannelore” an eel-shipping boat is a reminder of the once largest eel-shocker fleet in the Middle Rhein, representing the former powerful shipping and fishing crafts in Gernsheim.

Our path leads under old linden by the promenade Bar sur Aube boardwalk along the rhine harbor, built from the 1850s to the 1890s towards the city center. Before that we see on the left hand the restaurant “Zum Karpfen” [The Carp] where 1949 the annual "Rheinisches Fischerfest" [rhenish fishing festival] was created. To this day it takes place annually on the first weekend in August and is known well beyond the cities' borders. A plaque notes that the famous baroque musician and composer Georg Adam Joseph Schmitt saw the light of day 1734 in the house "The Carp".

After crossing the old B44 our way will lead us to the Magdalene avenue [Magdalenenstraße] and offers a view into one of the most beautiful areas of the city. We are now on the Schöffersplatz, there the

central point is crowned by statue of Peter Schoeffer. He was born about 1425 in Gernsheim and later entered the printing workshop of Johannes Gutenberg in Mainz, where he died in 1503. Peter Schoeffer was the most important employee of the famous inventor of typography Johannes Gutenberg. The world's best-known work from the hand of the most important son of Schöffersstadt is the Mainz Psalter, printed in 1457. The book has been recorded recently in the World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The monument of Peter Schoeffer was created in 1836 by the court sculptor Johann Baptist Scholl from Darmstadt.

On the far side of the monument stand the Schoeffer-school, which was built in the 1830s. Today it houses the local museum of Gernsheim and is nowadays named "Schöffershaus". On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the death of Peter Schöffers the entire ensemble was renovated and restored in 2003, including the "Schöffersplatz" and outbuildings where the city library and city archives of Gernsheimer are housed. The former fire station, housing a rich museum of the fire department, adds interesting value to the ensemble.

Heading downtown the town's landmark, the beautiful baroque church of Sankt Maria Magdalena and its curved onion dome, can be seen from quite a distance. The first mention of a church in Gernsheim was built in 908, probably belonging to the Carolingian royal court. The present church was built from 1750-53 to plans by the builder Johann Valentin Thomann of Mainz at the site of its predecessor, the late Gothic church.

In addition to the former four chapels – Nothelfer-chapel [no longer existent], both chapels on the way to Maria Einsiedel Fever-Chapel [1737] and Lourdes-Chapel [1901] as well as the chapel of St. Michael [1862] in the cemetery – there are 22 religious sculptures, Virgin-Mary-statues and crucifixes in the city's area.

After a few more meters we reach the City Hall built in 1839/40. Its stairs still hold the emblem of the former owner and ruler of the city, elector and bishop Franz Lothar von Schönborn.

If you want detailed information on the history of Gernsheim, the three books to recommend are the home town almanacs of 1956, 1981 and 2006, each issued for 600th, 625 and 650 anniversary of the city. Furthermore if you would like to delve into the families of Gernsheim and their genealogy data, the "family book of Gernsheim 1652-1875" is recommended.

Further information can be ordered in our Archive or the department for cultural interests.