

# The History of Steinwenden

In 1980, Steinwenden celebrated its 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Medieval charters mention the village's name at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. However, this does not mean that the settlement the village was based on is much older. As early as the first centuries AD, the location hosted parts of a "Villa Rustica", which was found in Steinwenden and its remains can be found today at the Roman tower in Steinwenden.

The settlement region included a large "Villa Rustica" (i.e., Roman farm house estate) that was abandoned at the end of the Roman reign around 400 AD. It was not until the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century that Franconian settlers cultivated the region by cutting down trees and began settling in the area. As a result, the "Koenigeinhausen" settlement emerged and documents evidenced its existence in 1430. By 1600, a single piece of land in Weltersbach named "Kendelhaeuser Tal" remains the only evidence of its former existence. During the High Medieval times, most likely during the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> Century, Steinwenden was founded.

## The meaning of the village name Steinwenden

For a period of time, researchers trying to understand the meaning behind the name Steinwenden suspected a correlation between the German words for "stones" ("Steine", "Felsen") and "wind" ("Wind"). This interpretation was originally supported by an official courthouse seal from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The seal depicts a heap of stones with a face blowing air on top of it to symbolize the wind. However, this interpretation is now considered false based on current and more trustworthy research. Researchers now believe that the name Steinwenden can be traced back to the old Germanic word "winne" (as compared to the village name "Winden" in Southern Rhineland Palatine), which translates to "terrain with pastures". Such large pastures always existed south of the village in between Steinwenden and Weltersbach, in the valley of the Moorsbach stream. The first part of Steinwenden ("Stein") most likely refers to the remains of the original Roman estate, located between Wiesental, Bruehl and the present-day Roemerstrasse (i.e., Roman street). The village name of Steinwenden can therefore be explained as "pasture close to stones" (or stonehouse, or stonewalls).

## Steinwenden in the Middle Ages

The name Steinwenden is first mentioned in a register by Werner II from Bolanden, tracking his "Lehen". "Lehen" were parts of land that were rented out by landlords in return for tax payments and services. Around 1180 AD, the village is documented as the property (or possibly part property) of Otto from Huneburg (Homburg), who was related to the Landlord of Lower Alsace, who in turn was a relative and co-heir of the Staufen family, a powerful noble family in Swabia. According to Prof. Dr. Hans Werle from Mainz, Otto came into possession of the land by splitting the inheritance with his brother, Dietrich of Merburg. Emperor Friedrich II, grandson of Barbarossa, confirmed that the pastures in the Steinwenden district are property of the Order of Canons Regular of Prémontré, also known as the Premonstratensians, of Kaiserslautern in 1215 AD. Additionally, Friedrich II granted a property in Steinwenden to Count Heinrich from Zweibruecken, including the right to appoint a pastor and maintain the tithe.

By the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, ownership of the property had changed as Hug Vogelsang Ritter of Udenheim and Gerhard of Heppenheim and his three sons were in possession of the Zweibruecken land. Upon the death of Heppenheimers, the property was first inherited by the Mauchenheim family and then, at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, by the Leyen family. The Leyen family remained involved with the property in Steinwenden until the French Revolution. During Electoral Palatinate times (i.e., since 1357) Steinwenden became the capital of the region, including the villages of Miesenbach, Kottweiler, Schwanden, Mackenbach and the settlement Steigen in addition to Steinwenden itself. The district consisted of one mayor, four jurymen and one court clerk.

#### After the 30-year war

Even 8 years after the Peace Treaty of Westphalia, our homeland was in a desolate state as reflected in a 1656 entry in the direct tax book number 12: "Nobody resides yet in the district of Steinwinden [most likely the complete aforementioned area]". This was due to the fact that the former inhabitants who fled from their homes during the war did not return. The resettlement of the area started around 1660 with, among others, the Swiss immigrants playing a major role in the noteworthy reconstruction that began under difficult circumstances and lasted for decades. The reformed church books contain the names of some of the resettlers: Berny, Buechi (Bichy, Bihi), Brennermann, Freyvogel, Hunzinger, Koller, Kyburtz, Zinsmeister and many more. Immigrants from Germany also moved to the region.

Steinwenden in 1684 consisted once again of six families, totaling approximately 25 residents. More than one hundred years later, in 1791, this number had risen to 305. Besides the mayor, the reformed and Lutheran pastors, two teachers and three court associates, a number of trade professionals were also present. The trade professionals included four linen weavers, two masons, two cobblers, two tailors, two blacksmiths, two brickmakers, two bakers, one cellarman (barrellmaker), one butcher and one miller. Additionally, there were one innkeeper and a tradesman. The lower class was comprised of six "Beisassen-families" (i.e., people who were not local, but rather had come from elsewhere to settle). Thirty-eight families lived off of farming the land.

The Electoral Palatinate era came to an end in late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, thereby ending the Steinwenden district as well. After the annexation of the left Rhine riverbank by France, Steinwenden became French property. With the introduction of the French civil administration in 1798, Steinwenden became part of the Obermohr city hall in the Landstuhl canton of the Zweibruecken arrondissement in the Donnersberg department of the French Republic. The French era liberated our ancestors from paying tithes and being owned by a landlord, but it also meant hard times early on for the inhabitants. Contemporary reports of Steinwenden's pastor Johann Carl Weber detail the often gruesome raids of so-called "emptying-out commission" in the homeland.

The French administration created new facilities lasting into Bavarian times. Steinwenden became home to the "Einnehmerei" (i.e., larger bank for the region), which was only disintegrated in 1972. From 1808 to 1817, the Einnehmerei also hosted the office of the notary for the Landstuhl canton. After Napoleon's defeat during the battle of the nations in Leipzig and the end of the French reign (1814), Steinwenden became the location for the mayor's office in the Bavarian time serving the villages Steinwenden, Weltersbach, Kttweiler-Schwanden and Obermohr. The development of the villages is characterized in a large part by strong population growth, economic crisis, shortage of food and jobs and dissatisfaction with the political situation. Therefore, it is not surprising that between 1825 and 1850 alone approximately five hundred people from Steinwend, Weltersbach and Obermohr emigrated to the

United States and Brazil. The connection between Steinwenden and the railroad from Landstuhl to Kusel in 1868 constitutes an important advantage as the construction of the line presented job opportunities. Many residents found jobs in the coalmines of Saarland or the new industrial centers of Ludwigshafen-Mannheim and Kaiserlautern.

#### Rapid upward development

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the regions experienced technical innovations such as the construction of a communal water supply in 1907 and an electrical network in 1912. Both WWI and WWII impacted local families, as they lost husbands, fathers and sons, causing great distress. After WWII, a rapid growth set in. Countless displaced persons from the former Eastern German regions settled in the area, new housing was developed, two long-existing businesses (Company Zimmer and Company Heil) developed into larger organizations and proved to be indispensable employers for the region.

A sewage system was put in place and the street system expanded. In the 1960s and 1970s, both villages received a mortuary as well as a new school and kindergarten. Since 1969, sports grounds on the Muehlberg were developed as well as a large gym, and the local gun club built a shooting range. Between 1965 and 1967, Catholics from both villages built a stately church along Kottweiler Street. A few years later, a smaller new-apostolic church was built in close proximity.

Adjacent to the Protestant church, which was built in 1852/1853 in the new-Roman style, the community created a park system on land purchased from private persons. The park was named in memory of Johannes Haerberle for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hambach Festival in 1982. Since the reform in 1972, the Steinwenden community belongs to the larger Ramstein-Miesenbach community. Today (as of 06/30/2009), Steinwenden counts 2,614 residents, including 690 in Obermohr, 643 in Weltersbach and 1,284 in Steinwenden.

#### Reference:

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