



The City's History



But once again Ulm makes a rapid recovery: The development of industrial area Donautal is started in 1951. The College for Design opens her gates on Oberer Kuhberg in 1955 (forced to close again in 1968), the engineering college – polytechnic college since 1972 – starts lectures in 1960. The university is founded in 1967. In concert with the polytechnic the university is at the core of the emerging Science City. A significant increase of area as well as residents develops through the incorporations from 1971 to 1975 and by 1980 Ulm reaches the 100.000 residents mark, officially claiming the title of "Großstadt" (= large city, metropolis).

By the beginning of the 80ies the industrial city enters an economic crisis, companies collapse and unemployment increases. The city doubles the efforts to break the economic mono structure. Successfully: utility vehicle manufacture still remains a strong industrial branch, but new employment is found first of all in service and science oriented endeavors (University II, Science Park, Research Institutes). By 1987 Ulm again is the site of more than 84000 jobs – with a total resident number of 104.000. Concerning city planning Ulm takes a leap as well: a new congress center is constructed on the Valckenburg bank. The main attraction however, takes place at the heart of the city, in Münster Square. In November 1993 the "Stadthaus", built to a design by New York Architect Richard Meier, is presented to the public; a house which is hotly debated for and against ever since, it's open design representing the liberal spirit of the former Free Imperial City.

Title illustration:
Ulm as seen from the South (Partial View) 1810

Editor: City of Ulm, Central Services / Public Relations and Representation 11/2011
Illustrations/Photographs: Ulm City Archive, UNT (Ulm/Neu-Ulm Tourism Ltd.)
Design: J. Jauss, Design, Ulm



Ulm and Neu-Ulm from Southwest, federal fortress fortifications in the foreground, around 1883

In addition, a second large construction site is the focus of attention. The completion of the Münster Cathedral between 1844 to 1890, raising the main spire to become the highest of its kind in the world, is a clear symbol for the city's revival. By 1913 Ulm already counts 60.000 residents; 10.000 of them are soldiers.

After WW I Ulm remains in relative calm, however, the city cannot stay outside political developments. In 1933 the National Socialists establish a concentration camp in the "Oberer Kuhberg" fortress, which is dissolved again in 1935. During the nationwide Night of Pogroms ("Kristallnacht") from November 9th to 10th 1938, the Ulm Synagogue on Weinhof is damaged. SA members tried to torch the building, but the fire doesn't cause too much damage. In spite of that, the demolition of the Jewish house of worship is initiated just a few days later.

During WW II the city is bombed several times by the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945. The heaviest bombardment hits Ulm citizens on December 17th, 1944, the third Sunday of Advent: 707 people die, 613 are wounded and around 25.000 people loose their homes. After the war 85% of the city center is destroyed, only 2633 buildings out of 12756 are undamaged. 5761 Ulm citizens have lost their lives during the war.



Ulm Münster Cathedral and Stadthaus by Richard Meier, 1993

200.000 guilders are the price for the French to withdraw from the occupied city. During the second coalition war (1799 to 1801) the Austrians occupy Ulm to be followed again by the French who have the fortification walls demolished. Finally, in 1802, independence – until then theoretically still in effect – comes to an official end: to make amends for the lost territory left of the Rhine river Ulm is annexed to the electorate of Bavaria and becomes capital of Swabia province. But Bavarian citizenship does not last for long: A state contract between Bavaria and Württemberg, opposed by the residents, declares Ulm a city of the Kingdom of Württemberg in 1810. The Danube river is the border to Bavaria. For Ulm the consequences are catastrophic: All Ulm properties on the other side of the river are now "foreign", the city is cut off from its hinterland.

By the first half of the 19th century hardly anything remains of the former splendor and significance: the powerful imperial city has deteriorated into a provincial town with only 12.000 residents. But quite soon Ulm regains the historical limelight: between 1842 and 1859 a workforce of close to 8000 builds the mighty federal fortress with 41 fortifications and a wall with a total length of 9 kilometers. The huge fortress construction site as well as the railroad connection in 1850 lead

to great economic development. The second half of the 19th century in Ulm marks the establishment of companies like Magirus, Wieland and Kässbohrer, known around the world.



View to Ulm Railroad Station from the South, 1851

Between 1634 and 1635 close to 5000 people fall prey to the Black Plague raging in Ulm. Another blow is dealt to the city in 1648: Upon the end of the 30-year-War Ulm has to carry a share of 120,00 guilders in compensation fines; the war itself had already claimed a total of 3,5 Million guilders through the years. Hardly recovered, a French army devastates the imperial city territory in 1688 and in 1702 Bavarian troops take Ulm in a surprise raid. Alternately garrisoned by French and Bavarian soldiers until 1704, the city has to pay 415,000 guilders to the occupation forces.



View of the junction Vestgasse to market square and southeast side of city hall, 1869

Impoverished, Ulm finally faces bankruptcy in 1770: Following the 7-year-War and a bad harvest the mountain of debt has grown to 4 Million guilders. This threatening financial state moves the emperor to act: he orders a debt redemption plan into effect. In 1773 Ulm has to sell the estate of Wain for 500.000 guilders.

In the following times however, Ulm has hardly any chance to reduce the debt. On the contrary: During the first coalition war of 1796/7 Ulm has to pay 2,2 Million guilders.

“Actum Hulmam palatio regio in Dei nomine feliciter. Amen”.

This Latin phrase is the start of Ulm’s “official” history: On July 22nd, 854, King Ludwig the German seals a document in the palatinate Ulma – the first known mention of today’s metropolis. As yet the small settlement around the imperial palace bears no resemblance to the future city. A few huts and farms grace the banks of Danube and Blau rivers. The regent and his court reside within the stone walls of the palace. In the surrounding area craftsmen have their homes, most likely built of wood and clay. The palace supplies are stored in Stadelhof – located in today’s Fishermen’s Quarter – and in Schwaighof on the right bank of the Danube.



Ulm view from the South with rafts and drawnet fishing in Sebastian Münster’s “Cosmographia”, copperplate 1544

Until the 12th century the Staufeu dynasty build up Ulm as one of their strongholds. However, this bears the seeds of catastrophe: During the bitter wars between Staufeu and Welfeu dynasties, in the year 1131, Welfeu Duke Heinrich the Proud of Bavaria destroys the villages around the palace, which he annihilates in 1134. But the Staufeu dynasty does not give up on Ulm: Palace and settlement are rebuilt and protected by a ring wall. Ulm becomes quite popular under the reign of Emperor Friedrich I. Barbarossa, the most important Staufeu emperor. Until 1183 he holds at least 7 great court councils in the palatinate, which is a designated city since 1181. The palace draws crafts- and tradesmen like a magnet and soon Ulm develops into a trade metropolis.

The 13th century marks the downfall of the Staufeu dynasty, bitter succession wars rock the Empire. Ulm maintains the direct attachment to emperor and king, develops a citizens self-administration and becomes “Free Imperial City” ruled by the patricians.

However, the residents are not satisfied; in the first half of the 14th century the craftsmen, united within their guilds, try to enter the city council, forcing their participation in city government. At times the situation resembles civil war, leading to a number of dead and wounded. The unrest lasts until 1345: The Small Oath Letter guarantees the Guilds a role in political affairs. More than that – they obtain a majority in the city council. 17 of 31 seats are held by Ulm Guild leaders.

Ulm joins 13 other imperial cities in the Swabian City Alliance opposing Karl IV. Imperial troops lay siege to the city in 1376. The troops retreat without success, however, the siege reveals an alarming weakness: In a war situation the 7th century parish church “enned fels” outside the city walls is in an unfortunate location – the faithful would be unable to go to church.

On June 30th, 1377, Ulm citizens act upon this realization: the foundation for the Ulm Münster cathedral is laid. The construction demonstrates an immense confidence: the rising city, home to around 10.000 residents, builds a gigantic cathedral holding up to 20.000 people. The entire project is financed by citizens’ donations.

Meanwhile, the Guilds expand their dominating position in the Ulm city state. The Large Oath Letter, 1397, reflects their powerful influence: next to the existing council a “Great council” with 40 members is constituted. The Guilds hold 30 seats. On top of that the patricians loose the active voting rights for city government.

The 15th century is witness to Ulm at the peak of it’s power and wealth: Ulm barchent and linen is sold in Genua, Venice, Geneva, Lyon, the Netherlands and even England. Next to that, the Free Imperial City is a trade center for iron, wine and wood. This wealth finds expression in the city’s property as well: next to the three towns Geislingen, Albeck and Langenau, 55 villages belong to Ulm – with the exception of Nuremberg no other city ever had such a large domain.



Guard on Danube Island around 1803

With a large majority Ulm citizens decide to convert to Protestantism in 1530. In 1546, during the Schmalckaldian war, the protestant city is forced to submit to the catholic emperor. Main reason for this is the acute financial crisis: Ulm has to raise 27.500 guilders for the war and the upkeep of her 7.500 troops. On the other hand, hardly any income can be raised for the empty city coffers – trade has ceased and 35 of Ulm’s 55 villages have been burned or pillaged.

West façade of Ulm Münster Cathedral, with incomplete western tower, to the left the Münster construction hut, around 1820



Ulm is able to achieve a special peace, avoiding total collapse, but this peace has a price: the imperial city is fined to pay 40 tons of gunpowder worth 25.000 guilders. In addition, Karl V. annuls the Large Oath Letter in 1546, abolishes the Guilds and establishes a council with patrician majority. 10 years later the guilds are permitted again, however, the patrician majority in city government remains unassailable.

Economic decline sets in. European trade routes and markets undergo massive changes upon the discovery of America and the sea routes to India. New production and trade centers arise in England and the Netherlands.

Political influence however, remains strong for another 200 years due to the central position in the swabian empire circle. Ulm gains cultural significance through the “accurate sciences”, especially mathematics, represented by Kepler, Furttenbach und Faulhaber.

“Actum Hulmam palatio regio in Dei nomine feliciter. Amen”.