

History of the hops trade in Nuremberg

First pieces of evidence for the hops trade in Nuremberg date from the middle of the 14th century (oath of the municipal hop measurer). During the 16th century Nuremberg as a regional trading place lost its importance to neighboring rural towns where the hop was cultivated (Hersbruck, Lauf, Spalt, Altdorf). The development of the modern hops trade in Nuremberg after the incorporation into the Bavarian state in 1806 was favored by the situation of the city in the center of the largest cultivable areas of hop in Bavaria (Haller-tau, Spalt, Altdorf, Hersbruck, Langenzenn, Neustadt a.d. Aisch) which dominated the German market for decades, and the improvement and expansion of the infrastructure.



(photo: Susanne Rieger)

Another factor was the interest of the authorities in a centralization of the hops trade in one place in order to make it easier for them to control the hop price as the basis of the beer tax. Since 1844 the municipal authorities, supported by the government of Middle Franconia tried to eliminate the trade by the mostly Jewish middlemen which had become habitual during the 18th century and in 1846 passed a hops market order. Though its restrictive rulings (obligations to store the product in the municipal hops hall and to publicize the market prices) hampered the trade gravely up to the suspension of the order in 1856, Nuremberg was established as Germany's center of the business.

The driving force of the business was the wholesale trade which was situated next to the official market at Karolinenstraße. Trade companies of surrounding areas moved to the city, since the abolition of the settlement ban in 1850 particularly Jewish families working in this field for generations (Tuchmann, Hopfmann, Hesselberger, Seidenberger). Old-established Nuremberg trade firms began to concentrate on hops (Scharrer & Amberger, Johannes Zeltner). A

variety of service and requisite enterprises associated to the trading developed such as transportation and packing material companies.

Nuremberg's breakthrough as the world's trading center for hops took place in 1858 when the Bavarian government allowed the sulfurization of the product, at first for export only, since 1862 also for the inland. The durability increased by sulfurizing favored the international trade and opened new markets to the companies. The ongoing boom is evident in the enormous increase of the commercial enterprises (1858: 25, 1895: 364) and the total of sales at the hop market (4,700 metric hundredweights in 1858, 187,500 in 1895). In 1872 the municipal authorities provided the trading firms a larger hops hall at the Hallplatz. Meanwhile the business had become more and more speculative for reasons of growing capital requirements to serve the international market.

The beginning of Nuremberg's fall as the world's metropolis of hops trade was marked by the expansion of the acreages abroad, primarily in the USA, and the loss of market shares of the German product as a consequence from this development. The blow which the export experienced by the collapse of the world market since 1914 could not be compensated after the end of WWI. The enterprises reacted with mergers (Krakenberger, Hesselberger and Hopf), but the sales of the Nuremberg hops market as a whole in 1926 dropped beneath the level of 1847. Consequently it was closed down in 1930.

The Nazis finally destroyed the hops trade as an important economic factor in the city by the "Aryanization" of the Jewish enterprises: In 1930 120 out of 171 or 70 % of the hop trading firms including the intermediate trade (commission agents and brokers) were Jewish. With the expulsion of the Jewish salesmen and their families, World War 2 and the Holocaust the history of this once blossoming Nuremberg branch of trade ended.

At the end of the 1990s there were three hops wholesale businesses left in Nuremberg: Johann Barth & Sohn; Hopunion Raiser, Scharrer KG; Lupofresh Allfeld & Egloff.

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Literature

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