

1871

View of Göttingen around 1830, with the deforested Hainberg in the background.



The East Turns Green - Thanks to Merkel's Beautification Association

With the planting of the Peace Oak above the Reinsbrunnen spring in April 1871, the legendary Mayor Georg Merkel launched his pet project: the reforestation of the Hainberg, east of the city. In his memoirs, Merkel described the impression this area made on the beholder: "The sight of the wasteland here is scarcely any bleaker and more cheerless than the view of the barren, gray limestone slopes glistening in the blazing sun in front of the city gates. "

Where do Göttingen's children come from?

In 1897/98 the city had the Reinsbrunnen bricked in. This spring was the origin of the legend that the little children of Göttingen came from here. To keep the legend from being forgotten, the Beautification Association decided to create a grotto in the immediate vicinity of the historic spring, featuring the bronze figure of a mermaid holding a small child in her arms. Although Senator Borheck had voiced his fear that the "naked bronze woman" might be harmful to "public morals," the mermaid was placed in the grotto. On several occasions, thieves tried to steal the figure, but their attempts were thwarted by the hefty size of the lady, who weighed in at 182.5 kilos.



Before the planting could begin, a total of eighty cross-dams first had to be constructed in the Molkengrund, Lange Nacht and Steinsgraben ravines to prevent further erosion of the terrain. A welcome side-effect of this measure was the ability of the Reinsbrunnen spring to provide more

water. Merkel began the project by planting undemanding trees such as spruces, acacias, and birches, to which beeches, maples, chestnuts, cherry trees, and ash trees were later added.

Between 1871 and 1882, 100 hectares on the Hainberg were reforested, and by the time Merkel retired in 1893, the total had reached 150 hectares. Moreover, in 1880 the creation of the "Kaiserallee," running from Hainholzweg along the Reinsgraben creek, had begun. This project resulted in a pleasant footpath leading up the Hainberg.

From the outset, Merkel had not viewed the Hainberg area as a commercial forest, but rather as a park with well-chosen tree species, tree-lined avenues, and solitary trees, as well as paths, bridges, benches, and little shelters. The Göttingen Beautification Association, established at his suggestion in 1876, championed the "layout, maintenance, and improvement of walks, and the beautification of public places and public structures of all kinds." This citizens' alliance is still in existence today.

Even after his retirement, Merkel - at the request of the city council - continued to be responsible for managing the upkeep and reforestation procedures on the Hainberg. His concept of natural forest management is still considered exemplary today, and in 1995, in an agreement with the environmental protection organization Greenpeace, the city pledged to respect the principles of nature-compatible forest use. Since 1997 the city forest has worked with Naturland, a registered association for organic agriculture.



After Merkel's death, Mayor Calsow had a commemorative stone erected on the Hainberg in 1896, to honor him.

The "Witch of the Hainberg"

In 1903, the orientalist Friedrich Carl Andreas and his wife, Lou Andreas Salomé, moved into a house on the Herzberger Landstraße. In 1914 Lou Andreas Salomé, a famous writer and psychoanalyst, opened the first psychoanalytic practice in Göttingen. Her unconventional lifestyle soon caused the virtuous citizens of Göttingen to label her the "witch of the Hainberg." In her memoirs, *Lebensrückblick* (published in English as *Looking Back*), she wrote about "Loufried," her home: "As if by a small, redeeming miracle, we found our little half-timbered house in an old orchard up on Rohn's plateau. At the time, the surrounding area was still so secluded that young fox cubs even made an appearance one day at the far corner of the long garden."

