

~ Oktoberfest ~



This is a combination of two articles about Oktoberfest which appeared in *Prosit* a number of years ago, followed by an update to the statistics

Part 1 - Oktoberfest, by Jack G. Lowenstein
(Originally printed in *Prosit* in September 1984)

It all started in 1810. The wedding of Crown Prince Ludwig (later to become Ludwig I) to Princess Therese of Saxony-Hildburghausen was planned for October 12. But Emperor Maximilian wanted something special for his son - and a young soldier, Franz Baumgartner, came up with a good idea: Why not celebrate the occasion with horse races and other entertainment? The suggestion was accepted and a large area on the outskirts of Munich was cleared for the events and renamed in honor of the young bride: *Theresienwiese*, or Theresien Meadow.

The anniversary of the royal wedding was celebrated annually, but it wasn't until 1835, the 25th anniversary of Ludwig and Therese, that Oktoberfest became a weeks-long celebration! The Fest started 2 weeks before the royal anniversary and came to an extravagant conclusion on October 12. Events included horse racing, sharpshooting contests, balloon ascensions, exhibitions - and the consumption of lots of food, especially beer.

Oktoberfest had come into its own!

In the ensuing years, Oktoberfest has been celebrated annually except for war years. It has become a 16-day-long festival, usually starting on the next-to-the-last Saturday in September and ending in October. The *Weise* is turned into a giant amusement park and beer tent city, each Munich brewer putting up a giant tent where its beer is served exclusively, together with sausages, roast chicken, fish, pretzel, red gingerbread hearts and other goodies. Over 5 million people come to Oktoberfest these days [1984], consuming some 20 million liters of beer, half a million roasted chickens and some million pairs of pork sausages.

For you history buffs: The large Bavaria statue on the side of the Theresien Meadow, in front of the Hall of Fame, was unveiled in 1850. This statue, shown on many Munich steins, depicts the Lady Bavaria holding the victor's wreath, with the Bavarian lion at her side.

And yes, the royal wedding of Ludwig and Therese did result in a lasting peace between the states of Bavaria and Saxony!

This year (1984) will celebrate the 150th Oktoberfest. And next year, the world's biggest beer bash will celebrate its 175th anniversary: 1810-1985.

Of course, where there's Munich and beer, there have to be beer steins. And commemorative beer steins there are. The best known Oktoberfest steins are those commemorating the 100th anniversary, 1810-1910. A large number of these anniversary steins were produced, probably by just about every stein manufacturer. Some - but not all - of these steins were stamped on



A Franz Ringer stein created for the Oktoberfest of 1910, and commemorating the wedding of Crown Prince Ludwig and Princess Therese 100 years earlier

the bottom, "Offizieller Festkrug - Oktoberfest 1910" or "Official Festival Stein - Oktoberfest 1910" (below).



Figure 1 - Official Festival Stein, 1910



Figure 2 - Four Oktoberfest Commemorative Steins

The next major anniversary was in 1935, the 125th. More Festival Steins were produced and sold. Above we see four Oktoberfest steins: The ½-liter steins on the left are 100th anniversary steins, while the 1-liter Krug and the ½-liter one to its right celebrate the 125th anniversary. The verse on the latter two steins perfectly reflects the spirit of the occasion:

*Froher Sinn,
Gemütlichkeit
Sind Münchens Art
Seit alter Zeit*

A happy spirit,
and Gemütlichkeit
Are Munich's style
Since olden times

Fig. 3 shows a rather uncommon stein, the Munich Child sitting on a great big red heart. No, it's not a Valentine Day's greeting. The heart here is the large candy, gingerbread or chocolate heart which a young gentleman gives to his love at Oktoberfest time, to hang around her neck for all to see: A heart for his dearest sweetheart!



Figure 3 - The Munich Child and an Oktoberfest heart



Figure 4 - A Modern Oktoberfest souvenir mug

Fig. 4 is a modern Oktoberfest mug, on sale at every souvenir stand on the Oktoberfest Wiese. Note that it reflects the decor of the 125th anniversary steins.

The next two Oktoberfests should provide ample opportunity for more collectable steins: This year is the 150th actual Oktoberfest, while next year will be the 175th anniversary of Ludwig and Therese's wedding and the very first Oktoberfest. Bring on the chicken; bring on the sausages; bring on the beer: **Prosit!**

(A gentle hint, dear reader: If you go to the Oktoberfest, do not walk off with one of the stein used for serving beer in the tents. There is a heavy fine if you are caught. Instead, buy the steins for just a few Marks - a sticker will be placed on the stein to show that it is indeed legitimately yours.)

Part 2 - Oktoberfest in Munich, by A. Chapman, Jr.
(Originally printed in Prosit in September 1976)

The world renowned Bavarian national festival, the Oktoberfest, held annually on the fairgrounds at Munich, Germany, can only be described in superlatives. It is absolutely the biggest, noisiest, liveliest and beeriest concentration of humanity ever assembled on this planet.

It all begins at high noon on the last Saturday in September and runs for sixteen roaring days. The many acres of the fairgrounds have been set up with miles of tents and booths featuring games of chance and skill, thrilling rides, side shows and a stupendous variety of outdoor cooking. The daily menu features charcoal grilled chickens, sausages in all their varieties, grilled fish spiked on sticks, whole oxen roasted on the spit over a pit of live coals and the ever present sandwich and pretzel stands.

Entrance is free and each year some five million people from all over the world are attracted to this fun fair of gigantic abundance. The tantalizing odors of outdoor cooking and cheerful jollity will long remain in the heart and memory of these millions.

However it is the seven huge tents, each the size of a Ringling Brothers big top, erected on the fairgrounds by Munich's seven principal breweries, which may be said to be the true heart and soul of the Oktoberfest.

It is here that a strong and specially brewed "*Weisn Bier*" is sold at a price now approaching a dollar and a half a liter, and which is drawn pre-cooled directly from large wooden barrels. In the not too distant past, the beer was served in one liter salt glazed stone mugs, locally called a "*Mass Krug*", but today at the Fest, the beer is usually served in heavy one liter thumb print pressed glass mugs. A favorite sport of the patrons (in spite of signs warning to the contrary conspicuously posted in several languages) is to attempt to sneak one of these Fest mugs out of the tent past the eagle eyes of the ever present uniformed "bouncers" who take a very dim view of such activities and are apt to react most harshly with would be souvenir collectors.

With as many as five foaming mugs in each hand, cheerful, buxom waitresses in colorful Bavarian costumes, jostle through the crowds keeping a steady stream of cold beer flowing from the barrels, located at several places on the perimeter of the tent. to some five thousand thirsty revelers seated at long plank tables. Hawkers criss-cross the floor with offers of comic hats, chocolate hearts (a must for the ladies), postcards, and souvenir beer mugs with the emblem of the tent's sponsoring brewery. Mugs which have been honestly purchased at the Fest have a paper seal attached to the handle, which allows the new owner to remove his prize from the tent without any "reaction" from the management.

In the late afternoon of each day, a fifty piece Bavarian brass band comes forth onto a stage centered in each tent, and for the next five of six hours, the tent rocks and sways to the beat of marches, waltzes, polkas and old German drinking songs. As soon as a tune starts from the bandstand, the words and music are at once picked up first by one table and then another until some five thousand singing revelers, locked arm in arm and swaying to the music, burst forth in one pleasing sound. By mid-evening the scene in a beer tent can only be described as utter Bedlam - a scene which it is said could only be adequately described to an outsider by the brush of a Hogarth and the pen of a Dickens. "You just gotta see it to believe it!"

And it all ends at eleven o'clock on the night of the third Sunday, the sixteenth happy day. The band sadly and slowly plays "*Auf Wiedersehen*"; the standing enthusiasts give forth with one long whistle, a last cheer, and another Oktoberfest passes into history. Everyone files out of the tents, across the fairgrounds and heads for home with the feeling that he has contributed his all to the greatest Oktoberfest ever. But then, there will always be another year and another Oktoberfest, which might even be bigger and better than the one which has just been brought to such a successful end.

Part 3 - The Statistics (from the Munich Tourist Office web site)

The attendance at Oktoberfest is about 6.5 million people. In 1999, Fest-goers consumed over 600,000 chickens, 150,000 pairs of pork sausages, 62,000 pork knuckles, 16,000 kg fish and 84 oxen. Beer consumption reached a new high with over 6 million liters being quaffed. Other drink preferences included wine (almost 31,000 liters), sparkling wine (almost 24,000 bottles), water and lemonade (444,000 bottles) and coffee or tea (198,000 cups). Munich's great "block party" makes all others pale by comparison.