

ENGLISH

MAXHAUS AND ST. MAXIMILIAN'S CHURCH

A place of history



maxhaus
KATHOLISCHES STADTHAUS
IN DÜSSELDORF

Extract from the book

HEINRICH HEINE – "BUCH LE GRAND"

On his schooldays

"I am a child again, playing with other children on the Schlossplatz at Düsseldorf on the Rhine. ... Düsseldorf is a town on the Rhine containing sixteen thousand souls, besides the many hundred thousands that are buried there. ... Little Wilhelm also lies there, and that is my fault. We were schoolfellows in the **Franciscan Convent school**, and we were playing together on that side of it where the Düssel flows between stone walls, and I said: "Wilhelm, get out the kitten, which has just fallen in" - and merrily he stepped on to the plank which crosses the brook, and snatched the kitten out of the water. But he fell in himself, and when he was taken out, he was wet and dead. The kitten lived to a good old age."

"School went on as before, and we again prepared our lessons. Roman history, dates, nouns ending in 'im', irregular verbs, Greek, Hebrew, geography, German, arithmetic. Heavens! The thought of it makes me giddy - everything had to be learnt by heart. ...While at school these numbers caused me endless anguish! But Arithmetic proper was worse still. ... But, fair lady, the irregular verbs - the difference between them and the regular verbs is that the former are the cause of more floggings - the irregular verbs are most terribly difficult. In the dark cloisters of the **Franciscan Convent**, not far from the schoolroom, there used to hang a great grey crucifix, a terrible picture which even now sometimes haunts my dreams and looks at me mournfully with fixed and bleeding eyes; - I often stood before this picture and prayed: "O thou poor Divinity, equally tortured with myself, if it is possible, let me keep the irregular verbs in my head."

HISTORY

Today, the Maxhaus is the centre of the catholic church in Düsseldorf. But what was the function of this place before? What is the history of this building? This flyer tells you all about the house and the neighbouring church, in times of old and present.

Settlement of the Franciscan Monks: first Convent

After the war of 30 years has ended, Duke Wolfgang Wilhelm encourages and supports the settling of Franciscan monks on the then still uninhabited citadel, today the site of Maxhaus. In **1661**, a first small convent house is built. In **1666**, when the "Black Death" strikes for a last time, the friars care for the victims of the disease. The first church next to the convent building, still in the late gothic style, is finished in **1668**. In **1673**, the friars open a college of theology inside the convent; in **1695**, they add a school for lay students, which is more or less the forerunner of today's elementary school "Max Schule".

The Settling of the Citadel

From **1685** on, Jan Wellem, the famous prince elector, supports the settling of the citadel by granting generous privileges. The prince himself is a great friend of the Franciscan friars and loves attending their services. The "Citadellstrasse" develops into a well-to-do middle class neighbourhood, while the "Schulstrasse" becomes the place of residence of the local nobility. The friars continue offering their traditional services: charity for the poor, nursing the sick, teaching the young, and preaching God's word in splendid masses rich in music.

Renovation and Enlargement

Around **1700**, church and convent house prove to be too small for the growing population of this part of Düsseldorf; besides, the buildings are in a state of dilapidation. So, a new church and a renovation of the convent building are planned. The first service in today's church is held in **1737**. The old and new patron saint of church and convent is St. Antony of Padua. In **1743** the building progress is finished. The new convent houses 36 friars; the building includes a vestry, a ward, and a brewery

Settlement of the
Franciscan Monks:
first Convent

The Settling of
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Renovation and
Enlargement

1650

1700

1750

Consequences of the secularization

In **1804**, this secularization totally changes all ecclesiastical life in Düsseldorf as well as elsewhere. The sites of church and convent become the objects of speculation - there are plans to tear both buildings down. A storm of protest among Düsseldorf's citizens prevents this. Nevertheless, the friars have to leave, all monastic orders are to be abolished. The monks find new areas of responsibility as parish priests of various churches in Düsseldorf or as teachers. In **1805**, Pope Pius VII authorizes the establishment of a new parish: St. Maximilian's, named after the patron saint of the prince elector at that time. Also in 1805, a grammar school is set up in the old convent building. The former refectory, the "Antoniussaal" is turned into a gym but survives in its original shape. The former St. Antony's church, now St. Maximilian's, continues cultivating splendid church music and liturgy. Renowned musicians like Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Robert Schumann work here for some time. More than 130 years ago, the well-known "Maxchor", one of the biggest catholic church choirs in Germany, was founded.

Heinrich Heine and other celebrities

From **1807 to 1814**, Heinrich Heine attends the Grammar School ("Lycée"). He writes down his memories of this time in his "Buch Le Grand". The former convent building accomodates school rooms, parish offices etc. and rented flats. Franz Grashof, "Father of modern German engineering", is born here on **11th July, 1826**.

Famous "Pastor Jääsch", Düsseldorf's beloved prison chaplain Friedrich Gerst, lives in one of the flats for a considerable time.



Consequences of
the secularization

Heinrich Heine and
other celebrities

1800

1850

1900



Second World War

The bombing of Düsseldorf also damages church and convent building. Priest, sexton, and courageous parishioners rescue the buildings from burning down. The parish can still use both buildings.

Transformation into today's Maxhaus

From **1999** on, there are plans to change the former convent building into a new catholic center. The alterations take a longer time than expected, since archeological surprises interrupt the working process a lot of times: century-old walls are found, the mortal remains of ancient friars are detected and have to be buried decently, the old refectory "Antoniussaal" becomes a restricted area - only preservationists are permitted to enter.

On **22nd September, 2006**, the new Maxhaus is formally opened by Cardinal Meisner.

Maxhaus – Catholic Center in Düsseldorf

Today, the Maxhaus is a fascinating place in the heart of Düsseldorf, proudly combining historic and modern architecture. The great variety of its programmes comprises cultural, religious, and gastronomic events. Apart from a permanent historical exhibition in the basement, there are free monthly guided tours all over the house focussing its history and present day use.

Second
World War

1950

Transformation into
today's Maxhaus

2000

Maxhaus – Catholic
Center in Düsseldorf

TODAY

maxhaus

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Opening hours

Tue – Fri 11:00 – 20:00 (during school vacations till 18:00)
Sat 11:00 – 18:00
Klosterhof Bistro: Tue – Sat 11:00 – 17:30

St. Maximilian

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