

St. Gilgen—The “Mozart Village”

St. Gilgen is rightly known as the “Mozart Village” even if Wolfgang Amadeus (1756–1791) never lived there. His mother, however, was born here in 1720 and was the daughter of the town’s custodian, Wolfgang Nikolaus Pertl (1667–1724). Pertl had studied law in Salzburg, was recognized for his musicality, and was appointed custodian of St. Gilgen in 1716; a powerful man, therefore, who acted as district commissioner, judge and financial officer. In 1719/1720, he had his forlorn official residence restored into its present dignified appearance.

His daughter Anna Maria (1720–1778) lived here for only four years and moved to Salzburg with her mother in 1724 after her father’s death, had a sickly constitution, and married, at the age of 27, Leopold Mozart (1719–1787), a court musician and respected violin teacher originally from Augsburg. From the seven Mozart children, only “Nannerl” and “Wolferl” survived. They both inherited the musicality of their forefathers, and were lucky to have an excellent teacher in their father. The piano playing duets of these “Wunderkinder” impressed rulers all over Western Europe. Mozart’s mother later accompanied him on his extensive tours, but the exhausting trip to Paris and her anxiety for her 22-year-old Wolferl, who remained relatively unrecognized in Paris, led to her death in Paris at the age of 57 where she is also buried. Nannerl took over her fa-



ther’s household after her mother’s death, supplemented his meager earnings with piano lessons, and in 1781, was disheartened when her father forbade her to marry the man of her fancy: an army captain. To escape from her unpleasant life in Salzburg, the 33-year-old Nannerl agreed to a marriage of convenience with the 48-year-old Johann Baptist von Berchtold zu Sommenberg, the wealthy custodian of St. Gilgen—a position once held by her Grandfather Pertl—and moved into her mother’s birthplace. Berchtold, a two-time widower, brought five children into the marriage and Nannerl gave birth to another three. After Berchtold died in 1801, Nannerl returned to Salzburg, withdrew herself evermore, became blind at the age of 74, but was still able to experience the joy of the publication, in 1828—one year before her death—of the first important Mozart biography.

The “Ischl Railway” had the Emperor’s Blessing



This “sweet, little railway” was once described in a hit song from the middle of the last century. This scene is an example of the road conditions in the supposedly “good old days”.

St. Wolfgang has one unique setting that it shares with Venice: the spectacular approach by ship, which docks, in both cases, in front of the main square. The trip through the Venetian lagoons begins at the parking place in Punta Sabbioni; whereas, the excursion on Lake Wolfgang begins at the Gschwendt parking place. The unpretentious building next to the parking place hardly attracts attention although it clearly differs from the Salzkammergut’s country style: The station of the Ischl Railway, which connected St. Wolfgang, St. Gilgen and Strobl to the touristic centers of Salzburg and Bad Ischl in 1883 and was discontinued in 1957.

A railway constructed in 1877, linking Ischl to the railway system between Vienna and Salzburg, lead finally to the construction of the Ischl Railway. The new railway reduced the trip from Vienna to Bad Ischl from four days to nine hours.

A direct connection to the Salzkammergut from Salzburg was still missing, however. Emperor Franz Josef personally granted the permit for this rail construction in 1880, but restricted the size of its track to a narrow width of 76 centimeters—the so-called “Bosnaspur”, a reference to the rail lines built in Bosnia and Herzegovina while under Austria’s control.

The width of the Ischl tracks was a calculated strategic move.

In 1875, Vienna, together with Russia, had supported the revolt in Bosnia and Herzegovina against Turkish rule, had then occupied the turbulent country of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and quickly extended the meager rail lines to around 1000 kilometers, thereby securing this strategically important part of the Balkans.

All over the Austro-Hungarian Empire, smaller railways were forced to accept the narrow tracks of the “Bosnapur”, so that locomotives and supply trains could immediately be at hand to assist the army in case of a Balkan crisis. The Ischl Rail-

way contributed one engine and a set of supply wagons to the Balkans in the First World War.

The Ischl Railway to Salzburg, measuring 63 kilometers, was completed in 1883—and prompted the construction of the Schafberg Railway. Although it cost 55 mil. Euros to build, the Ischl Railway had already transported 244,000 people and 30,000 tons of cargo by 1896.

Most importantly, the time it took to travel in the uncomfortable post coaches on the bumpy roads between Salzburg and Bad Ischl was cut in half to three-and-a-half hours. The touristic impact of the new railway on the Lake Wolfgang region



A picture postcard of the Schafberg Railway: a cog-engine train, nostalgic and at the same time highly technical and modern, a cloudless summer day, and the summit hotel.



Architecture and nature in St. Gilgen: A square tower from the 14th century, crowned with an octagonal top and a double onion-shaped spire; the Rettenkogel and the Sparber in the background.

cannot be overemphasized. The heyday of this railway during the “golden twenties”, carrying up to 600,000 passengers yearly, ended in the following decade with a ride along the brink of bankruptcy: the depression, unemployment up to 26%, Hitler’s long-standing visa fee of 4,000 Euros for Germans traveling into Austria (an effort to force the legalization of the NSDAP), which reduced the swarm of German guests to one tenth of its pre-

vious number, and finally, World War II. For a short while afterwards, the railway managed to raise the passenger quota to 800,000 yearly, but it could not compete with the rapidly increasing motorization and the “economic miracle” of the fifties. Despite angry protests, it was discontinued in 1957—today, it is viewed as a premature act not only for nostalgic reasons. The only memories left of the “sweet little railway” are in the lyrics of a song.



The mountain hut "Himmelspfort" lies precariously close to the rim of the Schafberg's north wall. Only grass and alpine flowers grow here. In the background is the Fuschlsee.