

“Bei uns ist immer was los!” Feste in Rheinland

## „WURSTMARKT“ IN BAD DÜRKHEIM / „SAUSAGE FAIR“ (held annually on the 2nd and 3rd weekends of September in the spa town of Bad Dürkheim in Rhine-Palatinate)

Each year the Palatinate rejoices in a celebration of food and drink that captures the essence of Gemütlichkeit.

Please pardon my confusion about the split identity of Bad Dürkheim's nearly six centuries old September festival. That is because even though its formal name is Dürkheimer Wurstmarkt, it is also billed as “Größtes Weinfest der Welt” – the “largest wine festival in the world.”

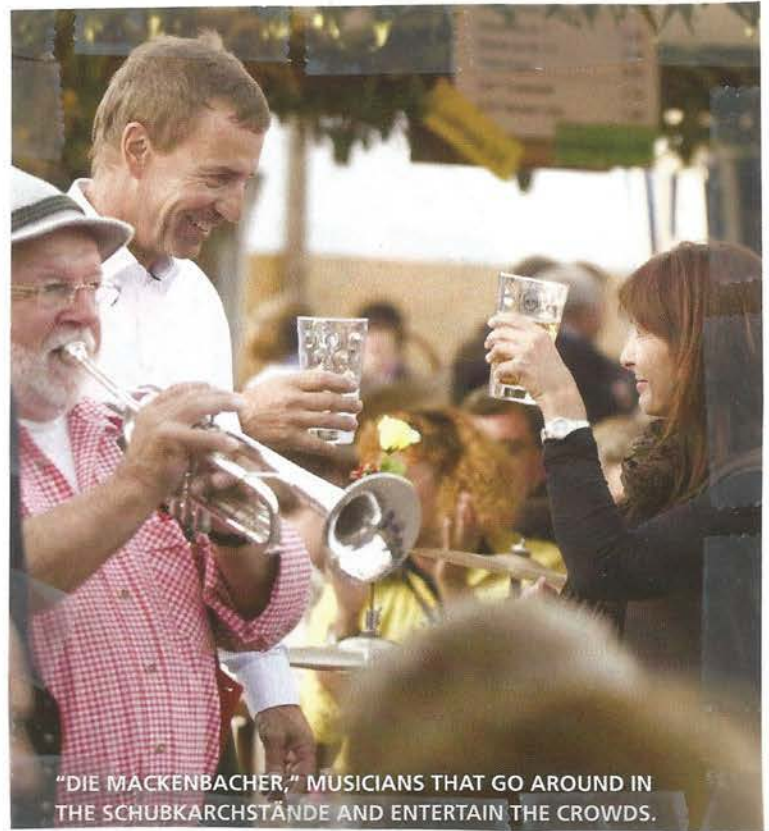
Literally meaning “sausage market,” this festival draws more than six hundred thousand visitors in its nine days (two extended weekends in the middle of September each year) to the Palatine city of Bad Dürkheim. With entertainment, amusement park rides, crowning of a new wine princess, food and wine aplenty, this festival may not have the publicity of Bavaria's Oktoberfest but makes up in added civility what it may lack in fame. However, its main claim to fame now is the opportunity to sample some one hundred fifty wines – from mellow Riesling to ice wine – in fifty different venues around the festival.

The festival traces its roots to the year 1417. For some centuries before that time, September 29 was the “saint day” for St. Michael, and the chapel dedicated in his name on the similarly named hill above the town, St. Michaelsberg, was the site of an annual pilgrimage for those seeking to earn indulgences from sins. As the number of pilgrims increased, more and more peasants and winegrowers transported their goods to the Michaelsberg with wheelbarrows to offer wine, sausage and bread for those waiting at the chapel.

As more and more traders – as well as entertainers such as tumblers and musicians – came for “saint day,” the event took on the air of a market. Indeed, already in 1449, the abbot of the nearby Limburg monastery issued the first market regulations and turned the event into a public church fair. Only a few more decades passed before traders from all over the Palatinate came to the market – everything including livestock (oxen, horses, and pigs), wool and linen cloth, furriers, metalworkers, saddlers, shoemakers, wood turners, hat makers, and iron traders sold their goods at what was then called the Michaelis Market, which was moved from the hill site on Michaelsberg to a lower (and therefore more accessible site) in 1577.

There were quarrels over feudal rights but by the late 1700s, the market had been expanded to three days. About this same time, traders such as potters and cooperers were becoming less important and the demand for entertainment was steadily growing. In 1830, there was a circus, fire-eaters, puppet shows, a riding school, other fairground entertainers, and numerous musicians.

The festival today has a program of activities that can suit nearly every taste – amusements for the family; musicians such as traveling “oompah” bands; food from pretzels to sausages to full meals; even a “humor day” with comic entertainment. There is also a new wine princess every year, and this “office”



“DIE MACKENBACHER,” MUSICIANS THAT GO AROUND IN THE SCHUBKARCHSTÄNDE AND ENTERTAIN THE CROWDS.

is taken seriously enough that the women chosen are immortalized with Roman numerals after their first names in the years after their “reigns.”

And, of course, there is the wine. Those fifty venues range from large wine halls and traditional *Schubkärchler* (small traditional wine stands with scrubbed wooden tables worn smooth over the years where everyone sits elbow to elbow) to the *Weindorf* (the wine village) with a quieter, more intimate atmosphere. Wine can be had in traditional glasses, but the locals prefer

“The Wurstmarkt is the only festival where you meet old friends you’ve never seen before.”

to drink the chilled white wine from large tumblers, filled about four-fifths with wine and then topped with a bit of mineral water (the larger glass means fewer times needed to hail the business servers and the