

Landkreis
Saalfeld-Rudolstadt



Residential Palace Saalfeld
The Cradle of European Dynasties



The Residential Palace Saalfeld is today the seat of the Saalfeld-Rudolstadt Regional Council.

On the Walls of King's Palace and Monastery

The baroque residential palace on the Petersberg is one of Saalfeld's most important landmarks. It was erected on the former site of an Ottonian king's palace and the richest and most powerful Benedictine monastery in Thuringia, St Peter and Paul.

Construction from 1677-1726

From 1680-1745, the city of Saalfeld was the residence of the dukes of Saxe-Saalfeld, later Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld. The duchy was formed during the Gotha provincial division in 1680. Duke Johann Ernst (1658-1729), the youngest of the seven sons of Duke Ernst des Frommen



from Saxe-Gotha (deceased 1675), inherited the smallest region, namely Saalfeld, with the administrative bodies of Saalfeld, Gräfenenthal, Probstzella, the city of Lehesten and later, Pößneck. His second-oldest brother, Duke Albrecht, who laid the foundation stone for the residence palace in Saalfeld in 1677, took over the more important region of Coburg. These political actions by Johann Ernst served as a “position-improvement strategy” in order to protect his position in the nobility. The construction of the palace and its residential quarters took the best part of 50 years. The first segment of the palace to be built by master builder, Johann Wilhelm Gundermann, was the central section, with two short side wings (*corps de logis*).

The crowning stones of the gables of the middle section date from the year 1682. In 1691, the *corps de logis* were ready for occupancy and the ducal family

moved from the “Old Palace” in the central city to the new residential palace. The two side wings, with the palace chapel in the northern wing (1704) and the festive hall in the southern wing (1720), were constructed much later under the direction of the Saxon master builder, Christian Richter from Weimar. The palace was completed with the construction of the ridge turret in 1726.



Artists from Italy

Italian artists were engaged to complete the decorative design of the staircase, the ducal apartments and the palace chapel. The stucco plasterer, Giovanni Caroveri, was responsible for the design of the two-storey staircase that makes up the central part of the Baroque palace. Bartolomeo Lucchese and his atelier was appointed general contractor for the stucco plastering of the palace chapel. The painter Carlo Ludoviko Castelli created the frescoes in the Trinity Church.

The pulpit altar was built by the sculptor Gottfried Gröninger from Erfurt. The altarpiece depicting the Ascension of Christ was created by the director of the Nürnberg School of Painting, Professor Johann Murrer.

The Main-Fraconian organ builders Jakob Theodor Berns and Johann Funsch were responsible for the organ, which featured two manuals, pedals and a total of 16 registers.



The Last Years of Residence

On the 8th of February, 1720, the palace chapel was consecrated on the occasion of the marriage of the Saalfeld Princess Sophia Wilhelmina to the Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt Prince Friedrich Anton. Johann Ernst had 13 children in total, although only two of his legal heirs, his sons Christian Ernst and Frank Josias, survived their father. They ruled together from 1729.

A Cradle of European Dynasties

After a long fight for inheritance following the death of the childless Albrecht, the dukes of Saalfeld were awarded the Coburg region in 1735 and the foundation for the ascension of the family's position was laid.

Franz Josias relocated his residence to Coburg. His descendants married into Europe's most important royal families, which is why Saalfeld, the baroque palace and its founding father, Johann Ernst, can be referred to as a "Cradle of European Dynasties".



The House of Saxe-Saalfeld



Coat of arms of the Ernestine dukes.

Johann Ernst
Duke of Saxe-Saalfeld
(*1658, †1729)

Franz Josias, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld
(*1697, †1764)

Ernst-Friedrich, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld
(*1724, †1800)

Franz Friedrich Anton, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld
(*1750, †1806)



Johann Ernst,
Duke of Saxe-Saalfeld

Ernst I., Herzog von
Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld
(*1784, †1844)
1826: Saxe-Coburg and Gotha

Victoria, Princess of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld, Duchess of Kent
(*1786, †1861)



Edward August,
Duke of Kent and Strathearn
(*1767, †1820)

Ernst II., Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha
(*1844, †1893)

Prinz Albert vof Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, Duke of Saxe
(*1819, †1861)



Queen Victoria
(*1819, †1901)

King Edward VII.
(*1841, †1910)

King Georg V.
(*1865, †1936)

King Georg VI.
(*1895, †1952)

Queen Elizabeth II.
(*1926)

Did you know?

Prince George Alexander Louis of Cambridge (* 22.7.2013), the first-born son of Prince William and Kate, is the 10-times great-grandson (great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great) grandson of the Duke of Saalfeld, Johann Ernst.



Reconstruction as Administrative Seat

After the death of Duke Christian Ernst, who died without heirs in 1745, the palace was used as an administrative seat for the surrounding area. During the last Ernestine provincial division in 1826, the Coburg dukes from Saalfeld took over the duchy of Gotha, and the Saalfeld region was annexed to the duchy of Meiningen. With a stroke of a pen, the memory of an independent Saalfeld dukedom disappeared from consciousness.

In the course of administrative reform in Thuringia in the early 20th century, the palace was converted from 1919 to 1922 to an administrative seat for the Saalfeld region. In the process, the building's interior was reapportioned, and numerous extant, valuable interior architectural features were destroyed. Only the stairwell and the palace church were left intact.

Several ceiling paintings from the ducal rooms – canvas oil paintings in carved wooden frames – were relocated to the stairwell and an adjoining room (today used as the Palace Gallery). The historical palace organ, no longer in use, fell into a state of disrepair. Following numerous renovations and the installation of a new floor covering, the palace church was reopened to the

public in 1984 for use as a ceremonial and concert hall. Seating for 200 guests is available in the church nave, with a further 80 seats in the gallery for concerts and festive occasions. A new concert organ with 21 registers was constructed in 1989 by the Stadtilm organ builder, Schönefeld, using the original historical organ facade.

Today, the palace is used as the seat of the regional council offices. Since 1990, numerous renovation and restoration procedures have taken place. The Saalfeld Palace, with its unique chapel, is a successful example of a harmonious unison of historic preservation and the modern use of a culturally significant and valuable building.

The former Garden Hall is today used as a licensing office. The contemporary Mediterranean décor provides a link to the room's previous interior design.



The Judgement of Paris

A famous episode in Greek mythology - ceiling paintings in the regional council offices



Eros

Aphrodite

Paris

Hermes

Hera

Athena

Who is the Most Beautiful?

All the gods from Mount Olympus were invited to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, except for Eris, the goddess of discord. Eris, feeling insulted, threw from the door a golden apple with the inscription in Greek: "For the most beautiful". There followed a great argument between Aphrodite, Athena and Hera regarding ownership of the apple – providing

the origins to the saying in English "the apple of discord". Zeus, as the highest of the gods of Olympus, removed himself from the affair, and instead laid the judgement in the hands of a mortal, declaring the innocent youth, Paris the Fair, to be arbitrator. Zeus then ordered Hermes, the messenger of the gods, to bring the goddesses to the Trojan

king's son, so Paris could decide for himself. In order to influence the prince's decision, each of the goddesses offered him a prize: Hera promised him dominion over the world, while Athena promised wisdom. Aphrodite however offered him the love of the most beautiful woman in the world, and was declared the winner of the competition.



Chamber choir rehearsal conducted by Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra organist Michael Schönheit.

Brought to Life

The Schlosskapelle Saalfeld Association was formed in 1993 with the purpose of promoting a wide range of events and concerts in the baroque palace chapel in Saalfeld. This includes the organisation and staging of chamber concerts by the palace chapel chamber choir (Schlosskapelle Saalfeld), piano and organ performances, serenade concerts, and musical-literary events. The association favours works from composers who either were or are associated with Saalfeld, such as Johann Phillip Kirnberger and Prince Louis Ferdinand von Preußen.

The association is also tasked with cultivating the cultural heritage of the royal princes' houses, which are connected with the Saalfeld Palace and the palace chapel.

Donations are welcome and can be made to the following bank account:

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