Explore the highlights of the Hohenzollern Route and discover the history of one of Germany's most influential dynasties. BY ZAC STEGER

Castles of a Dynasty—The Hohenzollern Route

Top: *Sigmaringen Castle.* ***Above:*** *Portraits of the Hohenzollern family and the original castle guestbook.* Courtesy Zac Steger.

The year 2008 quietly marked ninety years since Kaiser Wilhelm II was forced to abdicate, bringing an end to World War I and Imperial Germany. As one of the oldest and most influential families in Europe, the Hohenzollerns had made the Kingdom of Prussia the most dominant German-speaking power and, under the guidance of Otto von Bismarck, united the various duchies, principalities, and kingdoms into the German Empire. Their story begins far from Berlin in the hills of Swabia along the Hohenzollernstrasse (Hohenzollern Route), where two castles explore the history of one of Europe's most powerful dynasties.

Stretching around three hundred kilometers, the Hohenzollern Route takes visitors through the former territories of the family in southern Baden-Württemberg. Sights include the moated castle at Glatt, Beuron Abbey, and Schloss Haigerloch, site of the world's first

atomic reactor. However, two castles are must-sees: the ancestral seat of Burg Hohenzollern and Schloss Sigmaringen, seat of the Swabian family line.

A medieval chronicle traces the origins of the House of Hohenzollern back to the brothers Burchard and Wezil von Zollern, two knights who died in battle in 1061. It was in this same century that the first Hohenzollern fortress near Hechingen is mentioned, though little is known about it.

In 1188, Count Friedrich III von Zollern married the daughter of the burgrave in Nuremberg, setting the path for the family's expansion into Franconia. Upon the burgrave's death, Friedrich III inherited all of his possessions and titles, which were divided by the following generation. This split the family into two main branches: the Swabian line (Catholic), which remained close to the ancestral seat and the Franconian line (Protestant), which would continue their expansion into Brandenburg and Prussia.

Punctuated by various Friedrichs and Wilhelms, the Franconia-Brandenburg-Prussia line proved to be one of the most important families in Europe. By 1701, Friedrich III had crowned himself King in Prussia, which covered much of northern Germany and modern Poland. Following victory in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, Wilhelm I became Kaiser of a united German Empire.

Burg Hohenzollern

In Swabia, a dispute between Frederick XIII and his brother, Eitel Frederick, over their inheritance lead to a ten-month siege and the eventual destruction of the ancestral castle Burg Hohenzollern in 1423. Reconstruction on a second castle began in 1454, but by the seventeenth century the Swabian line had moved on to a more modern palace at Hechingen, as well as castles at Haigerloch and Sigmaringen.

During the Thirty Years' War, the castle inhabitants were starved out during a nine-month siege and, from 1667 to 1771, it was a military outpost for the Austrians. By the nineteenth century, it was back in the hands of the Hohenzollerns, though by this time it was little more than ruins.

A visit to the ancestral seat by Prince Friedrich Wilhelm IV moved him to order the reconstruction of Burg Hohenzollern, though he did not live to see its completion. Financing the project was resolved in 1846, giving the Prussian line two-thirds of the cost and one-third to the two Swabian lines. This continues today, with the Prussian line owning two-thirds and the remaining Swabian line owning the other third.

Today, Burg Hohenzollern stands dramatically atop the eight hundred fifty-five-meter high hill overlooking the beautiful Swabian landscape. It was designed by Friedrich August Stüler, a pupil of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, and completed in 1867 as a monument to the Hohenzollern dynasty. Though never serving as an actual residence, the castle remains one of the most treasured in Germany.

A castle tour begins in the Ahnensaal (Ancestral Hall), the walls of which are covered by the Hohenzollern family tree. Starting above the doorway with the earliest documented family members in the eleventh century, the trunk soon branches off into Swabian lines (red) and Franconian lines (blue), which later became the Brandenburg-Prussian line. It winds around the room and includes Prussian Kings and German

Top: *One of the most impressive rooms of Burg Hohenzollern is the Count's Hall which serves as a banquet hall and ballroom.* Courtesy Zac Steger.
Below: *The Hohenzollern Castle looking east.* Courtesy Zac Steger.

Emperors near the highest beams, and also shows the links to the houses of Habsburg, Baden, Burgundy, and the Kings of Romania.

One highlight of the castle is the Graafensaal (Count's Hall), which serves as a banquet hall and ballroom. Easily the largest and most awe-inspiring room of the castle, its red Nassau marble columns and Italian marble with a Solnhofen stone floor makes the hall look more like a cathedral.

The castle library connects the representational rooms with the private living areas. Eight murals above the oak bookcases reflect myths and historical events at the castle from the Middle Ages, including the mythical "White Lady," who is said to have snuck through an enemy camp to bring food and supplies to the castle during the siege of 1422 to 1423. In 2001, a medieval hidden passageway was uncovered that is believed to have been used by this mysterious lady, showing she may have been less myth than previously thought.

The private rooms feature a number of interesting items, mostly from the Brandenburg-Prussian line, including the castle guestbook in the King's Drawing Room, the first entry of which dates back to the inaugural ceremony by Wilhelm I on October 3, 1867. There is also a collection of engravings of King Friedrich II of Prussia ("Frederick the Great"), who reluctantly posed for portraits only a few times in his life, and the death mask of Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV.

The Blauer Salon (Blue Room), named due to the color of the furniture, is one of the most beautiful rooms of the castle. In addition to the parquet flooring and coffered ceiling, the walls are covered in gold stencil-painted wallpaper featuring the Prussian eagle. The paintings featured here include the wives of the Electors of Brandenburg, descendants of the Hohenzollern line. Notable portraits include those of Queen Augusta (1811 to 1890), and Queen Louise of Prussia (1776 to 1810).

Top left: *Sigmaringen Castle on the Danube.* Courtesy GNTO. ***Top right:*** *Hohenzollern Castle in the winter.* Courtesy GNTO. ***Above:*** *Frederick the Great's uniform with a bullet hole in the Burg Hohenzollern's treasury.* Courtesy Zac Steger.

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www.preussen.de
www.Hohenzollern.de
www.zollernalb.com

An outstanding collection of jewels, artworks, and memorabilia are found in the Schatzkammer (Royal Treasury), located in the former kitchen. Many articles belonging to Prussian King Frederick the Great are found here, such as china from the KPM porcelain factory, silverware, flutes, and snuffboxes, including one that saved his life at the Battle of Kunersdorf when a bullet ricocheted off it. The uniform with the bullet hole is also on display.

The most important piece is the jeweled Royal Prussian Crown, made for Emperor Wilhelm II in 1889. The crown design is based on that of the original, made in 1701, but whose jewels were later removed. Since a great robbery in 1953, the crown can now only be viewed in a safe.

A few preserved parts of the medieval castle

are found in St. Michael's Chapel, which dates back to 1461. The oldest known depiction of the family coat of arms can be seen in the stained glass windows. The Protestant Christ's Chapel was built in the nineteenth century. From 1952 to 1991, the coffins of Frederick the Great and his father, Friedrich Wilhelm I, the "Soldier King," were located in the chapel after being discovered in a salt mine by the American army. They were returned to Potsdam following reunification.

Sigmaringen

The Swabian line of the family can be explored at Schloss Sigmaringen, which both complements and contrasts Burg Hohenzollern. Nestled on a Jurassic limestone cliff in the small town of Sigmaringen, the castle dates back to 1077 and was shaped by three notable periods of reconstruction, with notable expansion under the Werdenberg family in the fifteenth century. It was acquired by the Hohenzollerns shortly after. The majority of the castle was destroyed during the great fire in 1893 and was redesigned shortly after by Johannes de Pay and Emanuel von Seidl in the Romantic Historicism style.

As Sigmaringen was used as a residence for the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen line up until the late 1990s, the castle has less of a museum feel. Guides provide not only insight into the history of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen line; they also give visitors a good idea of the more practical side of life at the castle.

Entering the castle through the Kanonenhalle (cannon hall), named for the cannons given as gifts by Napoleon III, visitors pass a small doorway that leads to the one of the most important rooms, the chapel. Open only by permission of the head of the family, Prince Friedrich Wilhelm von Hohenzollern, one can easily see the importance religion still plays for the Swabian line of the Hohenzollerns.

Private living areas, including the Französische Saal, the French styled dining room, and the Blaue Salon, the room of the princesses, give clues to the personal lives of the family. Even the bathrooms, dressing areas, and kitchen have their part of the story to tell about the family and their life in the late nineteenth century.

Of course, there are several formal rooms that reflect some of the pomp of nobility.

Top: *Statue guarding the entrance to Schloss Sigmaringen.* Courtesy Zac Steger. ***Middle:*** *Hohenzollern Statue in front of Sigmaringen's Town Hall.* Courtesy Zac Steger. ***Bottom:*** *Family portraits help tell the story of the Hohenzollerns.* Courtesy Zac Steger.

Entrance to Shloss Sigmaringen. Courtesy Zac Steger.

Decorated in a neo-baroque style with ceiling paintings and stucco, the Ahnensaal features the portraits of the Hohenzollern counts and princes from the Swabian line, which includes Carol I, the last King of Romania. A beautiful collection of Renaissance tapestries awaits visitors in the Portugiesische Galerie (Portuguese Gallery).

Prince Karl Anton's collection of unique weapons was the foundation of the Waffenhalle (armory). Today, there are over three thousand pieces from the fourteenth through twentieth centuries in this impressive exhibit, making it one of the largest private weapons collections in Europe.

The Hohenzollern dynasty played a significant part in German history and helped to lay the foundations of the nation as we know it. While the monarchy ended long ago, the House of Hohenzollern still exists. Georg Friedrich, who turns thirty-three in June, is the current head. **GL**

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Zac Steger's article on Ansbach, another Hohenzollern residence, appeared in the February-March 2009 issue of German Life. *He can be contacted at mail@zacsteger.com.*