

The former Trappist monastery on the “Rosenthal”

Through the turmoil of the revolution ...

The French Revolution of 1789 had massive consequences for society as a whole - also for the clergy and monastic orders. Because religious orders were abolished, all French people who wanted to continue living in a monastic community could do so only in exile. Among these were 24 monks from the La Trappe monastery in Normandy, who initially rented a monastery in Valsainte, Switzerland in May of 1791. However, this was soon too small, and several monks moved out to establish further settlements.

Three of them, including the future prior of the Darfeld Trappist monastery, Eugène de Laprade, set out for North America in August of 1793. Along the way, their first stop was in Westmalle near Antwerp in Belgium, where the first Trappist monastery in Flanders was built in June of 1794. However, after just a few weeks, the monks had to flee from the French revolutionary army.

Their next destination was the Archdiocese of Cologne in Germany. They hoped to be able to stay there as the Archbishop of Cologne Maximilian Franz Archduke of Austria was the brother of the French queen Marie-Antoinette.

... to Rosendahl

After a stopover in the Benedictine monastery in Brauweiler, Germany, the monks came to Marienfeld (Harsewinkel). In the Cistercian monastery there, de Laprade became acquainted with the Erbdroste (a sort of hereditary administration post) Adolf Heidenreich Droste zu Vischering - and the monks' odyssey came to a temporary end.

On September 16, 1795, the clergy erected the founding cross of the new Trappist branch of *La Maison-Dieu de l'Eternité de Notre Dame de La Trappe* (Trappist Monastery of Our Lady of Eternity) on the grounds of the Erbdroste in Darfeld. This is commonly known as the "Rosenthal Trappist Monastery", based on the neighbouring parish of the same name. The founding community consisted of nine monks and Prior de Laprade. Thanks to the financial support of the Münsterland nobility, the monastery was quickly built. The first bell "Antonia" was cast by Alexius Petit from Gescher on June 14, 1796.

Growth for the new monastery

In the meantime, by 1800 French troops had also reached the Trappist monastery in Valsainte; at which point, the abbot there sent monks, nuns, and children from his educational institutes to the monastery in Darfeld. On December 18, 1800, the Darfeld nunnery opened *La Maison-Dieu de Notre Dame de la Misericorde* (Convent of Our Lady of Mercy).

The Rosenthal Monastery had become a double monastery – but was soon hopelessly overcrowded. They then leased an almost empty Cistercian monastery three kilometers north in Klein Burlo, which initially failed due to resistance from the local prince-bishop (a bishop who was also the civil ruler of some secular principality).

After secularization in 1802 the monastery passed into the possession of Count Salm-Grumbach. In 1804 the monks were finally able to move into Klein Burlo, while the nuns stayed in the Rosenthal Monastery.

Eviction and return

After disputes with the abbot in the mother monastery in Valsainte, Prior de Laprade was elected abbot on June 6, 1806. Two years later, after papal confirmation, he was ordained in the cathedral in Münster. At that time, 79 monks and 42 nuns lived in the two Darfeld monasteries. However, the peace they found there did not last long. On the July 24, 1811, all the Trappist monasteries in the entire area under Napoleon's influence were dissolved by edict. The assets of the Darfeld monks were confiscated. The monks and nuns had to leave Darfeld and return to their home communities with only a few remaining on the site.

However, in 1814 almost all members of the religious order were able to return. Following a petition from Abbot de Laprade to the Prussian king, the Trappists were allowed to stay in Darfeld. However, various requirements made a normal religious life practically impossible for them. The government wanted to force them to give up the monastery. Consequently, de Laprade petitioned the French King Louis XVIII to allow them to reopen the La Trappe monastery in Normandy, where he wanted to take the Darfeld monks. Unfortunately, Abbot de Laprade was never to return to France again; he died on June 15, 1816, at the age of 50 in Borsut, Belgium.

The end of the Darfeld Trappist Monastery

A year before the abbot's death, a Darfeld monk managed to revive the first monastery in Entrammes in Mayenne after the revolution - just as he had promised in Klein Burlo. Five Darfeld monks, led by the head of the lay brothers Bernard de Girmont, went to Entrammes to prepare the monastery to receive the monks.

On February 21, 1815, the time had come and *L'Abbaye Notre Dame du Port du Salut* (Abbey of Our Lady of the Port of Salvation) opened its doors. This monastery and its more than 200-year history were the basis of a historical partnership established in 1970 between Entrammes, France and Rosendahl, Germany. The monastery still exists today, and its community actively participates in the town-twinning partnership.

After the sudden death of Abbot de Laprade, Petrus Klausener from Burtscheid near Aachen, Germany became his successor in the Rosenthal Monastery. However, due to a bad relationship with the government, the community decided not to elect an abbot. Instead, the monastery became a priory, directly subordinate to the General Superior in Rome.

Starting in 1823, Klausener started looking for a new home for the Darfeld monks outside the Prussian sphere of influence. He finally found what he was looking for in Alsace, France. Here, the people not only spoke German, but the French king had also given the Trappists permission to return.

In September 1825 the last 62 Darfeld Trappists (34 nuns and 28 monks) moved into the new monastery in Oelenberg near Reiningen, France. The monastery complex on the "Rosenthal" was demolished in 1826 and use of the site was returned to the hereditary administrators (the *Erbdroste*).