

## The Hall of Liberation in Kelheim – a Monument to War and Peace

“We want to become German and remain Bavarian!” This was the motto embraced by King Ludwig the First of Bavaria. Firmly rooted in early 19th century romantic nationalism, he wanted to make the impossible possible. Bavaria was to be an integral part of the German Confederation without becoming all too involved – Bavaria’s independence and culture were certainly not to be sacrificed.

Aware of this contradiction, King Ludwig the First had the Hall of Liberation built as a national memorial of the Napoleonic Wars. The monument commemorates difficult times for the German lands, full of battles, skirmishes, bitter defeats, and glorious victories – times when Central Europe took on a new shape in a phase of political and social change.

Only the best was good enough for the monumental building, so the king appointed his leading architect Friedrich von Gärtner to direct the construction work. When Gärtner died, another standout immediately took over: the gifted architect Leo von Klenze. Intent on making his own classicist mark on the Hall of Liberation, Klenze used only Gärtner’s basic concept and preliminary work.

The edifice on top of Michelsberg hill occupies a spot saturated in history, going back to the pre-Christian era, when the Celts built a fortified settlement there. Construction work at this particular location still proved to be extremely laborious. Even before laying the first cornerstone, the site needed extensive preparation. Roads and pathways had to be constructed for the thousands of workers and hundreds of draft animals to transport the tons of necessary material up to the hilltop.

For Ludwig, the building was a matter of the heart. He traveled to Kelheim many times and often stayed for weeks in order to supervise the work himself. He was particularly fond not only of the old Wittelsbach town of Kelheim, but also of the surrounding landscape.

Looming high and majestic on Michelsberg, the hall is located directly above the Weltenburg Narrows, the entry to the Danube Gorge Nature Reserve. It was Ludwig’s profound concern to preserve this beautiful landscape – even with aesthetic considerations certainly overriding ecological issues at the time.

A certain number keeps recurring in the context of the monument: At the 18 corners of the octadecagonal layout, 18 pillars support 18 statues, which allegorically represent the 18 German tribes.

What is the number 18 all about? It is a reminder of October 18, 1813, the date of the decisive Battle of the Nations at Leipzig, which heralded the end of Napoleon's reign. The date chosen for the opening ceremony of the Hall of Liberation is similarly significant: October 18, 1863, precisely 50 years after the Battle of Leipzig.