



THE COUVEN MUSEUM

Station on the Route Charlemagne

ROUTE CHARLEMAGNE AACHEN

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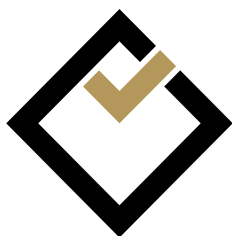
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Route Charlemagne

Aachen's Route Charlemagne connects significant locations around the city to create a path through history – one that leads from the past into the future. At the centre of the Route Charlemagne is the former palace complex of Charlemagne, with the Katschhof, the Town Hall and the Cathedral still bearing witness today of a site that formed the focal point of the first empire of truly European proportions.

Aachen is a historical town, a centre of science and learning, and a European city whose story can be seen as a history of Europe. This story, along with other major themes like religion, power, economy and media, are all reflected and explored in places like the Cathedral and the Town Hall, the International Newspaper Museum, the Grashaus, Haus Löwenstein, the Couven Museum, the Axis of Science, the SuperC of the RWTH Aachen University and the Elisenbrunnen.

The central starting point of the Route Charlemagne is the Centre Charlemagne, the new city museum located on the Katschhof between the Town Hall and the Cathedral. Here, visitors can get detailed information about all the stations and sights on the Route Charlemagne.



**ROUTE
CHARLEMAGNE
AACHEN**

After the Town Fire

On 2 May, 1656, a fire reduced the venerable imperial city of Aachen to ashes and rubble. Starting in a bakery, the flames destroyed about 90% of the town's centuries-old architecture in just 24 hours. Only few stone buildings, like the Cathedral, the Town Hall and the Großes Haus (which today houses the Newspaper Museum), survived the blaze.

After the catastrophe, the city needed to be rebuilt, and Aachen's reputation as a spa and bathing resort was a leading factor in setting the tone of the reconstruction. *"What fire has destroyed, water shall reedify,"* wrote the spa doctor Franziskus Blondel. In the space of just a few decades, a new, Baroque Aachen was created.

The Couven Family

During the reconstruction of Aachen into an 18th century Baroque bathing resort, Johann Joseph Couven (1701 - 1763) and his son Jakob Couven (1735 - 1812) achieved a mastery of their craft that made them famous far beyond Aachen. From 1739 until his death, Johann Joseph Couven was active as an architect, an engineer and as civic secretary. Couven's first major sacred building, the abbey church of St. John the Baptist in Burtscheid, built from 1730 to 1754, is considered to be one of the most important Baroque churches in the region between the rivers Maas and Rhine.

The only surviving building by his son Jakob Couven is Haus Monheim. It is used today as a museum, and is dedicated to the work of both architects.



The Couven Museum in Haus Monheim

Haus Monheim lies in the historic town centre, close to the Cathedral, the Town Hall and the old bathing and spa centre at Büchel. After the town fire, the apothecary Adam Coebergh bought the plot of land in 1662 and had a pharmacy built there. The importance of the pharmacy for Aachen as an emergent spa and bathing resort is clearly evident in the support willingly provided by the city, which supplied 8,000 bricks for the new building.

In 1786, Andreas Monheim, who had acquired the house in 1783, commissioned the architect Jakob Couven with its renovation. It was Couven who gave the building its familiar, present-day appearance.

Andreas Monheim left the house to his only son Johann Peter Josef Monheim, a man destined to become one of the most influential figures in 19th century Aachen. He played a crucial role in shaping the fortunes of his home town and, by building hospitals and nursing homes, strove to ease the social problems arising as a consequence of industrialisation. As a token of gratitude, he was made an honorary citizen of Aachen.

In 1958, the former Director of Civic Museums, Felix Kuetgens, established the Couven Museum in the house. There had already been a museum with this name in House Fey on Seilgraben, but it had been destroyed during an air raid in 1943. In 1967, the museum was extended by Peter and Irene Ludwig, née Monheim. They had the former neighbouring house "Zum Lindenbaum" decorated with more than 6,000 precious tiles, which they donated to the museum in 1982.

Today, Aachen's very own "front room" offers a permanent exhibition of domestic culture and home decor of the 18th and 19th centuries, supplemented by interesting temporary exhibitions on cultural and art history themes.

The Adler Pharmacy

In 1857, an Italian chocolate maker commissioned by the apothecary's son produced the very first chocolate bars in Germany. At that time, cocoa and chocolate were still mainly sold in pharmacies, as chocolate was considered to be a tonic and a remedy for digestive disorders and depression. Accordingly, the pharmacy in Haus Monheim also sold chocolate pastilles and suppositories made of cocoa butter.

The impressive clock, a so-called precision pendulum clock, is a reminder of Aachen's French era. It shows the time in all its units: seconds, minutes, days, weeks and months. During the French era, a common unit system of measurement was introduced (metres, kilometres, etc.) which not only permitted comparable results in scientific experiments but also simplified commercial trade.

The paintings show the most prominent occupants of the house: Johann Peter Josef Monheim and his wife Lucia Dorothea. The ceiling depicts Apollo and Luna, sun god and moon goddess, together with Aesculapius, the god of medicine, supervising the correct dosage of the remedies. This ceiling fresco was created by the Aachen-born painter Johann Chrysanth Bollenrath, who was also responsible for paintings in several of the rooms in the Town Hall.



The Gagini Room

This room is named after Pietro Nicolo Gagini. He was the creator of the splendid fireplace, built in 1778, which is a typical example of Louis-Seize style. This style is assigned to the period between 1760 and 1790; it marks the transition from late Baroque or Rococo to early neo-classicism. Immediately after the Louis-Seize period came the Directoire style (main period 1795-1799), followed by the Empire style (main period 1804-1820).



The Courtyard Room

The beginning of the 18th century was a time of profound cultural change in Europe. New luxuries and delicacies were now available, like coffee, tea, chocolate, tobacco and exotic spices. Table manners became more sophisticated, as did the interior decor and furnishings of upper-middle-class houses. Elaborate glass cabinets, especially in the style of those crafted in the Aachen-Liège region in the 18th century, displayed the pride of bourgeois society: porcelain. "White gold" was the epitome of courtly luxury, for until the beginning of the 18th century porcelain was only available as an import from East Asia (China, Japan).

The prominent features of this room are the Rococo Aachen porcelain display cabinet (circa 1750), a fireplace and mantelpiece from Haus Mennicken (Eupen) and a portrait showing a lady of the Clermont family, cloth manufacturers based in Vaals. The Clermont family originally came from Aachen but, like many other Protestants, left the imperial city during the religious unrest of 1600-1614 to re-settle in the surrounding area. As a result, Aachen lost most of its commercial and industrial vitality, while its environs flourished.

The room also features a portrait of an architect that for a long time was thought to be a portrait of Johann Jakob Couven himself. However, new evidence suggests that the figure in the painting proudly showing the tools of his trade is probably a contemporary fellow-architect.



The Inner Courtyard

The small inner courtyard with its fountain and blue flagstones connects Haus Monheim with the adjacent rear building, where, presumably from 1830 on, J. P.J. Monheim operated his newly-founded wholesale pharmaceutical business. The other building with access to the courtyard and the fountain is the former city weigh house, "Zur Waage", which now accommodates the Couven Museum's historical kitchen.



The Kitchen

Only few of the rooms in Haus Monheim were heated in winter, one of them being the kitchen. Of the original kitchen equipment, various cooking and fire utensils as well as a cooking range made by the Quint Ironworks near Trier (circa 1860) have been preserved.

The cast-iron coffee roaster, the splendid coffee mill and the kitchen cutlery all illustrate how, by the 18th century, luxury drinks like coffee, tea and chocolate, previously only available to the nobility, had now become an established part of middle-class life. Evidence of this adoption of courtly lifestyles into the bourgeois world can be seen repeatedly in the Couven Museum.



The Tiled Rooms

These two rooms, which originally belonged to the house "Zum Lindenbaum", were decorated in the 1960s with tiles from the Ludwig Collection.

The upstairs room displays Rotterdam tile pictures from the 18th century with depictions of the four seasons and of village festivals. The downstairs room has a dazzling variety of decorative tiles in groups of four, featuring motifs like children's games, landscapes, soldiers, shepherds, ships, sea monsters, cows, houses, or purely ornamental patterns.

The tiles with their rich colours and designs bear elegant witness to the Golden Age of the Netherlands that brought forth such artists as Rembrandt and Rubens. Thanks to overseas trade, the Netherlands with its ports Amsterdam and Rotterdam was one of the world's richest regions in those days.



The Directoire Room

Canvas paintings from the end of the 18th century decorate this room. They depict idealised landscapes and biblical scenes like the flight to Egypt. The motifs originated in France.

The furniture style of the Directoire period reflects the radical changes in society after the French Revolution. Classical decorative motifs like the Roman coin portrait on console tables and fire screen are typical of the style of the young republic. The frame around the stove alcove is an expression of the "Egyptomania" that was sparked off by Napoleon's expedition to Egypt. The inlay commode from the end of the 18th century came directly from France.



The Small Salon

The so-called "Kölner Decke" ("Cologne ceiling") with its visible beam structure and plastered bridging joists dates from the earlier Coebergh period of the house. From 1700 on, smooth ceilings were preferred as a medium for fresco paintings and stucco work. An outstanding example of the furniture of the 18th century is the Aachen Rococo commode with pendulum clock from about 1760, a typical piece of "combination furniture".



The Banqueting Hall

The banqueting hall or ballroom of the house, which reflects the self-image of the upper-middle class at the end of the 18th century, is entered through winged doors crowned with supraports. This is where the master of the house welcomed his guests to conclude contracts and make agreements. Appropriately, the view through the window features the Town Hall, the seat of political power.

Johann Peter Josef Monheim's circle of friends and acquaintances included prominent personalities like the politician and entrepreneur David Hansemann or the Pastor family. It is thanks to them and to other like-minded industrialists that Aachen was among the first cities to be connected to the railway network.

The sumptuous neo-classical silver vase on the sill of the middle window was presented to J.P.J. Monheim in 1841 in recognition of his services to the city.



“The Chinese Cabinet”

This room displays exhibits of the China vogue that, originating in the royal courts, spread to bourgeois circles in the course of the 18th century. In China, porcelain was produced specially to meet European tastes, and traded in exchange for stoneware from Raeren.



The Green Salon

The marble fireplace, designed by Couven, comes from the "Kerstenschen Pavillon". This pavillon, which was created at about the same time as the Wespian house, has today found a permanent home on Lousberg.

Johann Joseph Couven received numerous contracts for the construction of public and private buildings. As often as not, such contracts, as for example in the case of the war-damaged house of the cloth manufacturer and Lord Mayor, Johann von Wespian, involved not only the exterior design but also the interior decoration.



The Raree Show Cabinet

Along the window sills of this room there are a number of so-called "raree show" cabinets, a popular attraction from the 18th century. The Couven Museum boasts one of the largest surviving collections in Germany. Structured in the style of stage sets, the raree shows display theatrical scenes and biblical motifs.



The Empire Room

The tone of this room is set by the mahogany furniture so typical of the Empire style of the early 19th century. The portraits display a few more major protagonists of Aachen's industrial history. A neo-classical double portrait by the Aachen-born artist Johann Baptist Bastiné shows the Pastors. The cloth and needle manufacturer Philipp Heinrich Pastor already owned a steam engine in 1813. He had married his daughters to sons of the Liège industrialist James Cockerill and had received this recent invention as bride price.

A portrait from 1824 depicts the family of District Councillor Friedrich Freiherr von Coels von der Brügghe. This wealthy family of merchants was responsible for the reconstruction of Burg Frankenberg, along with other buildings.

A further double portrait from the Biedermeier period, also painted by Bastiné, shows the merchant and art dealer Johann Heinrich Beissel and his wife Therese Beissel-Chorus with their 13-year-old son, Jakob. The landscape in the background offers a view of Lousberg with its obelisks.

The table cabinet displays fans, fashionable accessories and a deck of cards from the French era. French soldiers are portrayed on the Hearts suit.



The Landscape Room

The painted riverscapes and mountain scenes take the observer on a journey without having to leave the room. Of course, the landscapes depicted are not real but idealised images.

The Viennese square piano from the early 19th century testifies to the chamber music that was an established part of bourgeois family lifestyle.



The Biedermeier Room

This room completes the tour of the house. It represents the style of the period between the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the March Revolution in 1848. Since the Napoleonic Wars, there had been a shortage of financial means and materials for elaborate interior design. A plain and functional style of furnishing emerged. Local wood types like cherry or ash were crafted into plain but solid pieces of furniture.

The name Biedermeier came from the "Flying Sheets" magazine, a satirical publication that poked fun at the sluggish middle classes through the fictional characters "Biedermann and Bummelmeier". This room with its small sewing table and the pearl-embroidered cushions on the sofa reflects an emphasis on domestic handicrafts, characteristic of the bourgeois retreat into the private sphere.



Service

Opening times:

Tuesday – Sunday
10.00 am – 6.00 pm

The whole building may be closed to the public due to special events.

Please check in advance at the museum ticket office (Tel. +49 (0)241/ 432 4421) or on www.couven-museum.de

Admission:

Single visitors: 5,- Euro / concessions 3,- Euro
Groups: 3,- Euro per person
(of 8 or more)

Guided tours for individual visitors:

Dates: Saturdays 3.00 pm
Sundays 11.15 am
Languages: D
Starting point: pharmacy
Duration: approx. 1 hour
Price: included in admission fee

Guided tours for groups (must be booked in advance):

Dates: by arrangement
Languages: D, GB, F
Starting point: museum foyer
Duration: approx. 1 hour
Participants: groups of up to 15 persons

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