

begotten by the Swabian sky, impregnating with its kiss the town below, which then gave birth to her.” (Act 1, Scene 1).

Kathy, the charming and wealthy daughter of a Heilbronn armorer, has found the man of her dreams, Count Wetter vom Strahl – but, sadly, class differences are in the way of their relationship. However, that does not stop the commoner girl from following, in mysterious devotion, every single step her cherished knight takes. In the meantime, Strahl believes that he has found his bride as foretold in a dream, namely the daughter of an Emperor: Kunigunde von Thurneck, who is befitting his rank. However, Kathy has also had an apparition of an angel at the very same time, who presented her Strahl as her husband-to-be. But before this heavenly prophecy can come true, Kathy must pass an “ordeal by fire”. Towards the end, a final “miracle” happens – Kathy, in truth a child of the Emperor, is led to the altar by the Count.

The question as to why Heinrich von Kleist chose the city of Heilbronn of all places to set his play in has not been convincingly answered to this very day. An acquaintance of Kleist’s, wrote in 1819 that Kleist had found “the entire story of Kathy as a folk legend” and had kept “the printed pamphlet”, “which he had bought at a funfair”. However, said pamphlet has not been found so far. It is widely believed in Heilbronn that Kleist found the material for his play in the medical records of a Heilbronn girl. There is no single historical character that the central figure of the play might be modelled on.



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Kathy of Heilbronn

The History of Heilbronn’s Symbolic Figure.



Kathy and Heilbronn

It is thanks to the five-act drama “Kathy of Heilbronn or the Ordeal by Fire”, written by poet Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811) in 1807-08 and first staged in Vienna in 1810, that the City of Heilbronn became known all over the world. The superb historic knight play combines a wealth of fairytale-like and romantic elements with a fairly colourful and impassioned plot. The play’s fifteen-year old main character, Kathy, is one of Heinrich von Kleist’s most endearing dramatic characters, who has been both a symbolical and real personification of female beauty, virtue and unconditional devotion for a long time.

“When Kathy went down the street in her Sunday best, with her straw hat gleaming yellow, her black velvet bodice and her little silver chain, there were whispers at every window. ‘There she goes Kathy of Heilbronn!’ Kathy of Heilbronn, gentlemen, was as though

“Be it to accompany you on a guided tour through Heilbronn or to represent the city at your event – we will be happy to be there!”

For booking requests please contact:

Wir für Heilbronn e. V.

Kirchbrunnenstraße 3 | 74072 Heilbronn

Phone +49 7131 56 22 65

info@wir-fuer-heilbronn.com

Pia

Lynn



Kathy Contest and Festival

As early as in 1843, printed guidebooks referred to a medieval-style building bordering the market square as “Käthchenhaus” (Kathy’s House). It is said that Kathy jumped to her death through its bay window. “Real” girls, acting as Kathy and dressed up in historic costumes, have represented the city since at least 1872. During the 1920s and 1950s, “Kathy Festivals” were held on the Deutschhof grounds, Heilbronn’s former monastery. From 1950 onwards, Kathy has been re-established as a symbolic figure for the city. Since 1970, a new Kathy girl and her two stand-ins have been elected every two years.

Since April 2025 Pia Sonntag and Lynn Jacob have been the new Kathys of Heilbronn. They have been representing the city as its symbolic figure in an authentic and likeable manner at official events at home and abroad.



Sembdner Kleist Archive

The Sembdner Kleist Archive, run by the City of Heilbronn since 1991, is based on the collection of Kleist researcher and editor Professor Dr Helmut Sembdner (1914-1997) and constitutes an important port of call for people interested in German playwright Heinrich von Kleist.

A principal field of work is the figure of Käthchen, also known as Catherine of Heilbronn, covering various facets, from historical theatre productions to the popular local history of reception, influence and impact. The Sembdner Kleist Archive organizes both academic conferences and events for the general public on Kleist, his times and his reception.

Kleist-Archiv Sembdner

c/o Literaturhaus Heilbronn

Trappensee 1 | 74074 Heilbronn

Phone +49 7131 56 26 68

literaturhaus@heilbronn.de

LITERATURHAUS.HEILBRONN.DE

Souvenirs

KATHY CHOCOLATE COIN | Euro 4.90

Made from milk or dark chocolate, produced by Schell Schokoladen Manufaktur.

KATHY COLORING BOOK | Euro 6

A short tour of Heilbronn for primary school children.

HEILBRONN COLORED PENCILS | 12 pieces | Euro 3.90

The pens are encased in a lovingly designed cardboard sleeve, decorated with Heilbronn motifs and Kathy.

BOZZETTO | ca. 8 in. (20 cm) | Euro 43.90

Dieter Läßle’s Kathy figurine as a gold and bronze bozzetto.

KATHY SPARKLING WINE | 0.75 l | Euro 7.50

Heilbronn sparkling wine in a gift bag.

KATHY BEER | 2 bootles | Euro 5.00

The Kathy Spezial is a light, bottom-fermented, full-bodied beer – modeled after the historical original, but with a modern twist. Two bottles in a gift box.

These and other souvenirs are available online at our shop on [SHOP.HEILBRONN.DE](https://shop.heilbronn.de) or at the Heilbronn Tourist Information. Guided tours with Kathy and other travel offers may also be booked there.



Tourist Information Centre

Kaiserstraße 17 | 74072 Heilbronn

Phone +49 7131 56 22 70

info@heilbronn-marketing.de

VISIT.HEILBRONN.DE

opening hours

Monday to Friday 10 am - 6 pm, Saturday 10 am - 4 pm