

## **5-LAMMERSDORF**

### **Lammersdorf before the Vennbahn – barren soil, failed harvests and economic misery**

The Eifel was called the “Siberia of the Rhineland” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; desolate, rough and cold. Barren soils and farms divided by inheritance worsened a situation in which many small farmers and businesses not only lived precariously, but lost their livelihoods. In the 1870s, repeated failed harvests and years of economic misery, especially in highland communities such as Lammersdorf, made things even worse. Plans were afoot to open up the North Eifel to the railway, but this planning went on too long to stop the decline for many. Young men began to leave the villages in search of paying work, particularly in the steel and metal industries of Aachen and Stolberg. Some left for good, emigrating to America. But the arrival of the Vennbahn in 1885 changed things dramatically, especially in Lammersdorf.

### **The Vennbahn’s arrival is followed by restaurants, cafes and hotels**

The addition of passenger services on the Vennbahn between Aachen/Rothe Erde and St Vith in 1885 came as a blessing for Lammersdorf, in particular for tourism. Just four years later, in 1889, it was observed with satisfaction that tourist visits had “quite considerably augmented”. With the arrival of passenger services not only restaurants and cafes began to open, but hotels were built. The first to sniff the changing wind was Michael Josef Mertens. He had operated a pub in the Kirchgasse (number 34 today) since 1861. As soon as the site of Lammersdorf station was certain, he quickly built his dream of a hotel (today Bahnhofstraße 12) on a plot directly opposite. So on 1st July 1885, not only the station was officially opened, but also its essential tourist accessory just across the street, the “Gasthof zur Eisenbahn” (Railway Hotel). It contained seven heated “bedrooms for strangers”, with ten “complete beds”, a “room for the communal leisure use of guests” and a “guest stall”. By 1929, there were four hotels, two pubs and a cafe in tiny Lammersdorf. Yet on account of the considerable demand, there was never any difficulty, even though several hostleries lay cheek by jowl.

### **Guide books and marketing in the olden days**

In the “Ur-Eifel-Führer” (Original Eifel Guide) from 1889, the Vennbahn is already being heralded as a harbinger of good fortune for tourism in the region. In a section dedicated to Lammersdorf it notes: “Now the high plain has been reached and the slope becomes more gradual. Look left into the distant hills of the Rur. The Fen-like, barren quality of this bare and meagre soil becomes more apparent.” Lammersdorf is praised for its hiking paths. In the sixth edition of the Eifel-Guide, from 1896, the Vennbahn station is recommended as the “departure point for a visit to the wild Kall valley”, along with the “Johann Mertens Hotel” opposite as a place to return to for sustenance and a good night’s rest. A single room with breakfast cost 2 Marks in those days, lunch was 1.20 Marks and supper 80 Pfennigs. For a 5-day stay, a guest would pay between 15 and 18 Marks.

### **In those days, overnight guests valued the fresh Lammersdorf air the most**

The conversion of the Vennbahn to two tracks made a denser schedule possible between Aachen and Monschau. By 1910, there were nine trains daily between Lammersdorf and Monschau. Thanks to the railway, those living in Aachen could now reasonably head into the hills for a weekend of hiking. Excursions planned by the Aachen section of the “German and Austrian Alpine Association” now also included “alpine” destinations in the northern Eifel. In addition, it made outings possible for those tourists who were not so suited to hiking. Winter in Lammersdorf was also a popular time. In the brochure “Winter beyond the Eifel”, it appears in the section “Overview of Sport and Lodging Options” in second place behind Aachen, thanks to its toboggan slopes and possibilities for cross-country skiing. Overnight guests particularly valued the fresh Lammersdorf air.

### **Holiday greetings from Lammersdorf**

The first postcards appeared in Lammersdorf towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Subjects of choice were the most important buildings in the village and its hotels. In 1912, a certain Maria Haas from

Schwäbisch Gmünd took her holiday in this Fenland village. The few lines from her postcard home are enthusiastic indeed: “Took a long hike through the Eifel today, starting early. Majestic ravines, valleys, rocky outcrops and rushing mountain torrents. Just like in Switzerland. Fantastic! It’s quite rough and chilly around here!” Today, these simple postmarked cardboard views are fascinating witnesses to a bygone era. Although postcards could be sent from Lammersdorf post office, they could also be handed in and franked during one’s journey home by Vennbahn, which is why some holiday cards bear the postmark “Aachen – St Vith (Eifel) Bahnpost” (Railway Post) as well as the train’s own number.

### **The villagers of Lammersdorf also travelled afar with the Vennbahn**

Not only did visitors arrive by Vennbahn in Lammersdorf, the good people of the village also began to travel. Many of the locals had hardly been outside the borders of their village prior to 1885. Now excursions were possible out into the “wide world” of Aachen or Cologne, at least for those with the necessary means. And, of course, for these pious rural folk, pilgrimages to the holy sites of Aachen and Kornelimünster could also be undertaken with the Vennbahn.

### **Lammersdorf becomes a tourist destination**

At the end of 1850, there were three public houses serving alcohol. Thanks to the Vennbahn, tourism developed into a significant economic factor. But this development took decades. By 1929, there were four hotels, two pubs and a cafe in Lammersdorf. As the village’s senior police official, the mayor was expected to see to it that there was no over-supply in the HoReCa sector. Thanks to expanding demand, catering and overnight facilities survived even in closest proximity. For example, the “Hotel zum Stern” (Star Hotel) and the “Café zur Pol-Ecke” (Paul’s Corner Cafe) were a mere 100 metres from the “Hotel Lammersdorfer Hof”. For a description of the facilities available, in a local hotel, the postcard sent by one guest at the “Hotel Eifeler Hof” gives a good idea: “Telephone, Lift, Central Heating, Electric Light, Hot Water, Modern Baths, etc, with Special Terms for 10-day Guests”. Today’s Gasthof Kreitz in Kirchstraße 28 also enjoyed an extensive clientele. In 1907, it boasted four unheated “chambers” and six heated “rooms”. In 1928, Wilhelm Kreitz replaced the old building with a new one featuring a guest saloon, a small dance hall, a shop and five well-equipped guest rooms with a total of six beds, central heating and running water.

### **After tourism, Lammersdorf becomes an industrial site**

With the founding by Otto Junker in 1924 of his internationally-known casting and oven construction company in Lammersdorf, the North Eifel village received another push up the economic ladder. Many jobs were created; the population began to rise rapidly. This had an influence on the appearance and scale of the village, certainly by 1937, as the first of several “suburbs” began to take shape. The former farmer’s village is today a flourishing industrial location.