

The “Silent Night” locations in Upper Austria:

Following the traces of composer Franz Xaver Gruber and those of the Christmas song’s first print

There are three “Silent Night” locations in Upper Austria: Franz Xaver Gruber was born in Hochburg-Ach, where he also spent his childhood and adolescence. In Ried im Innkreis, he completed his training to become a school teacher, whereas the first known printed version of “Silent Night” was published in Steyr around the year 1830.

Hochburg-Ach: Franz Xaver Gruber’s childhood, schooling and teaching period

Franz Xaver Gruber was born on 25 November 1787 at Unterweizburg 9, in the small village of Hochburg, as the fifth of six children in a rural weaving family. He spent his childhood and school days in Hochburg, just a few kilometres from the Salzach river and Burghausen in Bavaria, where his great musical abilities were already well known to his teacher Andreas Peterlechner and the priest Simon Dobler. At the local parish church, the just 11-year-old Franz Xaver Gruber had the opportunity in 1798 to demonstrate his extraordinary talents, which, until that point, were still being doubted by his father. The teacher had fallen ill and the mass was unlikely to take place. Young Franz Xaver Gruber was asked to substitute for the teacher, which his father didn’t think he was capable of. After hesitating at first, his father gave him permission after all and accompanied his son to the mass. There, Franz played the organ just as well as his teacher. Now, even his father was convinced by his son’s abilities, giving up on his dismissive attitude. A key moment in the boy’s life! A spinet was acquired, which his father personally brought from Burghausen to Hochburg. From then on, young Franz could practice during evenings and during leisure time.

His house of the birth, the “Steinpointsölde” is no longer around. The building constructed in its place now holds a memorial plaque. Abiding by his father’s demands, Gruber learned the weaving craft, but was able to begin his training as a teacher in Ried once he turned 18. In order to gain the necessary work experience, Gruber returned to Hochburg for a year and worked as an assistant teacher with his former teacher Andreas Peterlechner.

Experience “Silent Night” here today:

- The museum within the **Franz Xaver Gruber Memorial House (“Grubahäusl”)** depicts the rural way of life and work around the year 1800. The now more than 200-year-old wooden house is identical to Gruber’s birthplace in terms of style, form and design: The most precious piece is the loom with which Franz Xaver Gruber learned the weaving craft. Curator Hans Schwarzmayr and his team provide guided tours for those registering in advance.
- The **Franz Xaver Gruber peace path** is a beautiful circular trail that can be covered in around one hour of walking time. The path is lined with sculptures by the Tyrolean sculptor Hubert J. Flörl: They depict angel wings, symbolically carrying the message of peace to all the continents of the world. The path reflects the peaceful connection between the people of the world and invites visitors to reflect on these themes.
- On each third Advent weekend, the **historical event “On the Search of the Silent Night”** takes place in Hochburg with amateur actors. Amid an exciting atmosphere, visitors are taken on the song’s eventful journey through the world.

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Ried im Innkreis: Franz Xaver Gruber's training to become a teacher

Franz Xaver Gruber completed his teaching examinations in Ried im Innkreis in 1806. Until 1779, Ried and the entire Innviertel region had been Bavarian, and only fell to Austria following the War of the Bavarian Succession. During Napoleon's days, it was passed back and forth several times between Bavaria and Austria. The path of the nativity scene from Oberndorf, in front of which Gruber and Mohr performed "Silent Night" for the first time, also took a fateful turn. Following several detours, the nativity scene made it into the Innviertler Volkskundehaus Museum in Ried and today counts among the collection's highlights.

Experience "Silent Night" here today:

- The **Innviertler Volkskundehaus Museum** contains the original "Silent Night" nativity scene" from the St. Nikola church in Oberndorf. When the church had to be demolished due to continuous flooding, the old parish nativity scene was given away. In 1933, the priest Johann Veichtlbauer gifted it again, which brought it to Ried. The Silent Night nativity scene is modelled after the Venetian examples from the year 1800, with figures typical for the Inn-Salzach region – hands and feet are carved from wood, the head is made of wax. The shepherds are dressed in the typical garbs of farmers and skippers at the time.

Steyr: Where the song was first printed, reproduced and sold

Joseph Greis, book printer and seller in Steyr, published a pamphlet between 1827 and 1832 (exact date unknown) with the title "Four Beautiful New Christmas Songs". The cover page featured "Silent Night" as well. This proves that the first written version of the song was printed in Steyr. Since Greis was a bookseller, the print could be purchased from him as well. The printed lyrics of the text includes all six stanzas, albeit also a few inconsistencies: Joseph Greis had probably acquired a copy that was hard to read or there may have been errors during typesetting. How exactly he got hold of the song remains unknown.

Experience "Silent Night" here today:

- A replica of the song's first text print will be available from November 2018 at the **1st Austrian Christmas Museum** in Steyr. Guided tours of the Christmas Museum are available throughout the year if you register with the tourist board in Steyr.

Special tip for the 2018 Silent Night anniversary:

From 1 December to 2 February 2019, the special exhibition "Christmas Singing" in the Schlossmuseum Linz will be dedicated to the **200 Years "Silent Night"** and **135 Years "Es wird scho glei dumper"** anniversaries. Next to the history of Upper Austria's Christmas music culture, there will also be special exhibitions about Upper Austria's relationship to these internationally renowned songs. Furthermore, there will be additional material on other famous and less famous Upper Austrian Christmas songs. New recordings of musical examples will complement the predominantly archival exhibition pieces, bringing Upper Austria's music culture to life. In coordination with the Upper Austrian Volksliedwerk association, curated by Dr. Klaus Petermayr.