

THE REVOLUTION OF 1848 AND THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY IN NEUSS

In 1848, the **municipal meadows outside of the former Hesse Gate** were a central location of the revolution in the Rhineland. Many thousand people assembled here on 10 September 1848 in a first major gathering of **democrats of the left Lower Rhine region**. In the afternoon, they listened to speeches by prominent representatives of Democrats' Associations and People's Clubs such as **Josef Herzfeld** (Neuss), **Ferdinand Lassalle** (Düsseldorf) and **Heinrich Bürgers** (Cologne) – the latter two close acquaintances of Karl Marx. The speakers criticised the new statutes on civil militias, and especially Lassalle the cessation of hostilities between Prussia and Denmark. The protesters argued the case for **German unity** and called upon the National Diet of Frankfort, in session at the same time, to defend the **achievements of the March Revolution**, i.e. government by the people. Afterwards the crowds marched through the town. For Neuss, this rally of **5,000 to 10,000 participants was a major event**, considering that its population then numbered just over 9,000 inhabitants. While the police report referred to "riots", the city's mayor Adam Breuer spoke of a peaceful meeting.



Citizens of Neuss, lithograph, c. 1837

The civic-democratic revolution of 1848 was a European event that had started in France in the February of that year. Since then, Baden, Saxony, Berlin and the Prussian Rhineland had become increasingly politicised. The people demonstrated for **democratic reforms** of both the military and the judiciary, for freedom of the press, a parliament of the people, national unity and the abolition of the monarchy. The large rally in Neuss was followed in September 1848 by similar gatherings in Krefeld, Cologne and on the Rhine meadows near Worringen.



On the meadows outside of the Hesse Gate, lithograph, c. 1835

Neuss remained a **stronghold of the revolution** with the meeting place in the inn of publican Reiner Lucas, where on 21 November 1848 Ferdinand Lassalle called for armed resistance against the threatened siege. His call remained unheard, but his speech resulted in **Lassalle's arrest**. However, several more such gatherings followed in Neuss. On 10 May 1849, 2000 protesters marched from Gladbach to Neuss. When additional armed forces were stationed in the city because of a feared attack on the armoury, the marchers surrendered. The Neuss democrat Josef Herzfeld fled to America.



The city of Neuss and the meadows outside of the Hesse Gate, manoeuvre map, 1842



The merchant Michael Frings (1795-1872); member of the National Diet of 1848 and mayor of Neuss from 1851 to 1857, photograph, c. 1870



Young Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864), lithograph, c.1850 (© Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf D.1908)
In 1863, Lassalle was one of the founders and the first president of the General German Workers' Association, a forerunner of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), established in 1890.

The revolution of 1848/49 had not yet led to a breakthrough for democracy, but paved the way for the developments of the subsequent decades: **the unification of Germany and the establishment of a constitutional state** in Prussia. Neuss, too, played its part in this – not least with the rally on the meadows outside of the Hesse Gate.

(Sources and texts: Neuss municipal archives)

February 1848
February Revolution in France

May 1848
Citizens of Neuss who believe in democracy establish the Democratic Club.

22 May 1848
The Prussian Constituent National Assembly meets in Berlin.

21 November 1848
At a meeting, Lassalle calls for resistance by the citizens of Neuss. He is arrested the following day.

3 April 1849
Frederick William IV. refuses the German imperial crown offered by the German National Assembly.

30 May 1849
Three-class electoral system is introduced in Prussia

March 1848
March Revolution in Prussia and other German states

18 May 1848
The German National Assembly meets in St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt.

10 September 1848
Large gathering of the democratic unions in the park in front of the Hesse Gate

5 December 1848
The Prussian King Frederick William IV. dissolves the Prussian National Assembly and imposes a constitution.

10 May 1849
Thousands of democrats march to Neuss from surrounding towns. However, they abandon their plans to storm the arsenal (Zeughaus).

