



**EGLISE PROTESTANTE
UNIE DE FRANCE**

communauté luthérienne et réformée

Paroisse Saint-Martin Montbéliard



**The Lutheran church "Saint-Martin"
Montbéliard**

Eglise protestante unie de France
Paroisse de Montbéliard
18 rue Viette 25200 Montbéliard

The Lutheran church "Saint-Martin" - Montbéliard

The church of Saint-Martin de Montbéliard was built between 1601 and 1607, and is the oldest monument from the Reformation era that can be found in France. Although other Huguenot temples have been built in France throughout the second half of the 16th century, all of them have later been destroyed.

Its building was the work of two men: Prince Frederick I and architect Heinrich Schickhardt.

Frederick was born in 1557 in the Castle of Montbéliard, a few months before the passing of his father, Count Georges. After completing his studies in Stuttgart and Tübingen, he returned to Montbéliard, where he started to exercise sovereignty from 1581 onwards.

A proud and authoritarian character, his curiosity and open-mindedness would lead him to do much for the development of the county. He ruled with an absolute power, only moderated in Montbéliard by the Magistrate. Being prince sovereign, he had authority in civilian and military affairs, as well as in religious (he was also prince-bishop) and judicial matters (along with the Magistrate). During the 27 years of his reign, the region experienced an unprecedented development in areas such as urban planning and architecture, scientific, technical and agricultural development, as well as social and religious organization.

Born in 1558 in Herrenberg (Württemberg), **Heinrich Schickhardt** was raised in a lower middle-class family. Shortly after joining the Dukes of Württemberg's architecture workshop, his talents as a designer and decorator quickly got him noticed. As a result, he was gradually put in charge of more important works, notably the reconstruction of the city of Clerval, which had been devastated by a huge fire.

It was on this occasion that he met young prince Frederick. Both men had the same age and shared a common passion for architecture, and before long, Frederick asked Schickhardt to go into his service. Schickhardt accepted, and settled in Montbéliard in the year 1600. One year later, Frederick asked him to build a church which would be dedicated to the Lutheran religion.

The population growth of the city (having gone up from 2000 inhabitants in 1590, to 3600 in 1618), due notably to the crowd of French Huguenots who had come to Montbéliard in the wake of wars of religion, is without doubt the main cause of the construction of Saint-Martin, which would be built in the same spot than a older and smaller edifice.

Some German historians, however, have a more romantic explanation: according to it, Frederick had survived to a violent storm during a journey to England, and consequently sworn to build seven churches to the glory of God. But since vowing is not customary in the Lutheran tradition, one can emit doubts about the veracity of this story...

However, one thing that is for certain is that the building of Saint-Martin was as much a proof of power for Frederick, as one of excellence for the architect towards his prince.

The first stone of the current church was laid in 1601 on Thursday, March 5th, in the presence of the church's superintendent, the ministers, the castle's governor, and all other authorities from the city and principality. An inscription was engraved in the building's foundations, on the side of the town hall.

The fabric of the building took four years to build, from 1601 to 1605 (the South portal is dated 1604). Two teams of builders were involved in it, one from Montbéliard and the other from Württemberg.

The materials used in the construction all came from the region: the limestone was from Vandoncourt, the sandstone from Chagey and Champey... In total, more than 20,000 stones had to be cut and sculpted. The framework was built in three weeks during the month of August 1604, using fir wood from Porrentruy and oak wood from Etobon and Berverne. More than 500

IN THE YEAR OF SALVATION 1601, ON THE
3RD DAY OF THE NONES OF MARCH, IN
THE REIGN OF EMPEROR RUDOLPH II
This first stone was laid so that, with God's
help, the very noble Prince and Lord
Frederick, Duke of Württemberg and Teck,
Count of Montbéliard, out of pious generosity,
as a replacement of an older and smaller
building, ordered that another one, great and
new, be built.

This is the work of Heinrich Schickhardt von
Herrenberg, highly renowned architect.

MAY THE GOOD LORD GRANT THAT THIS
PLACE SERVE TO PRAISE CHRIST AND TO
CELEBRATE HIS GLORY AND TO FURTHER
HELP IN THE BUILDING OF HIS CHURCH

DEUS OPT. MAX.
AMEN.

elements were used to put it together, some of which were 49 feet long. On the other hand, the roofing work dragged on; indeed, the 60,000 necessary tiles had to be brought from Montbéliard and Héricourt.

The nave measures internally 121 feet in length and 52.5 feet in width, and the 36 feet-high ceiling is supported only by the nave to which it is suspended. The central medallion that formerly housed the Württemberg's coat of arms nowadays represents the Good Shepherd, work of an anonymous painter of the 17th century.

The Tuscan pattern chosen to decorate the façades is characteristic of the Italian Renaissance: thirty-four flat pilasters rest on an 8 feet-high pedestal. Doubled at the corners and at the central part of the apse, these pilasters divide seven bays lengthwise and three widthwise. The bays are lit by windows topped by broken pediments, which are in turn straight and rounded.

The portals are surmounted by similar broken pediments and an oculus, and are ornate with painted blazons, all of which (but one) would disappear during the French Revolution. Moreover, the Southern portal bears a dedication in Latin,:

Through pious ardour, the very noble Prince
Frederick, Duke of Württemberg and Teck,
Count of Montbéliard (etc.) put up this new
temple in the glory of our Lord.
MDCIII
Work of Heinrich Schickhardt, Herrenberg's
architect 1604
The mark of sculptor Pierre Aigner can be seen under
the text.

The dedication took place on October 18th, 1607, in the presence of the local authorities, leading citizens such as the nine "maîtres bourgeois" and members of the "corps des XVIII", along with a great crowd of commoners. The sermon of the minister Samuel Cucuel was later followed by a Holy Communion service.

Sadly, the church's inner decoration, the façade's pediments, and the belfry that Schickhardt had designed were never finished. This interruption of the work might have been caused by pecuniary difficulties or, more likely, by Frederick's death, which happened in 1608. Indeed, more modest and less attached to Montbéliard, his heirs quickly gave up on the idea of pursuing any expensive project in the city. Another element that needs to be taken into consideration is the political, economical and social difficulties that existed at the time.

After various restorations (notably the one conducted in 1837), the face of Saint-Martin is not the same as in times past. The pulpit was formerly on the left side of the building, and the window that is masked by it today used to be open.

A temporary bell tower had been built in 1677, and although it originally housed three bells that had been taken from the castle, it now only contains the bell from the ancient abbey of Belchamp. The bell bears the following inscription:

VOX MEA CONCTORUM SIT TERROR
DOEMONUM

May my voice be the terror of demons

Brother Jehan Vaucher, abbot, 1517

The Reformation in Montbéliard

In 1520, Ulrich, Duke of Württemberg since 1498, was banished from the Empire by Charles V and found shelter in Montbéliard. Eager to recover his properties, he contacted some bankers based in Basel in order to borrow the necessary funds. There, he met disciples from Zwingli and Oecolampade; seduced by their innovative ideas, he converted in 1524 and called on Farel, a preacher born in Gap, to teach the principles of the Reformation to the people of Montbéliard. As early as 1525, external pressures (notably from the archbishopric of Besançon and some Swiss Catholic princes) made Ulrich's situation all the more difficult by threatening to make him lose the support he had managed to gain on the other side of the Jura Mountains. After having been sent back by Ulrich, Farel decided to join Calvin in Geneva. This first attempt to introduce the Reformation in Montbéliard might therefore be considered somewhat of a setback. In 1530, Ulrich got back his lands in Württemberg, and entrusted Montbéliard to his brother Georges. In 1535, Georges called on a new reformer by the name of Pierre Toussain, former canon of Metz, who had been trained in Tübingen. Toussain then started to organize the Protestant community of Montbéliard. In 1538, mass was abolished, priests were chased away and churches were assigned to the Protestant service. In 1541, Ulrich took Montbéliard away from Georges and entrusted the county to his son Christophe, a committed Lutheran. It was in 1541 that Protestantism was actually established in Montbéliard. In 1548, Charles V laid on Catholicism to the whole Empire. However, this "interim" only lasted but a few months.

In 1552, Christophe definitely laid on Lutheranism in Montbéliard. In 1559, influenced by Toussain, he published a ruling with the aim to control religious life; amongst other things, the ruling stated that school was to become compulsory for both boys and girls.

From 1562 onwards, many Calvinist Huguenots who had been chased away from France in the wake of wars of religion came to find shelter in Montbéliard. But before long, dissensions with the Lutheran prince arose. In 1586, a religious colloquy was organized in Montbéliard, but the Lutherans from Württemberg led by Andreas and the French Calvinists led by Theodore Beza failed to find an agreement. In 1588, the prince settled the question: being state religion, Lutheranism would from then on be the one and only Church admitted in Montbéliard. As a consequence, many Calvinists left the city.

In 1677, French troops occupied the city. After having ordered his soldiers to raze it to the ground, Louis XIV decided to change his mind, impressed by the determination shown by the German princes. As a result, only the stronghold and fortification were destroyed. Catholicism was then restored for a few years.

The introduction of the Reformation throughout the county had some very important consequences:

- Compulsory education –owed to the obligation to read the Bible–, combined with the introduction of printing, gave to the people of Montbéliard an open-mindedness by far superior to that of the neighbouring cities.
- The arrival of a new immigrant population, generally of a high social level, stimulated the local trade and craft industries; indeed, at the time, the county was isolated from its neighbours by a strong border, and its inhabitants had to rely on themselves to produce the main part of their resources. This situation, however uncomfortable, encouraged the people of Montbéliard to think and promoted spirit of enterprise: they had to put up with the necessity of living “among themselves”.
- Relations with the neighbouring provinces were scarce, and this situation gave rise to a feeling of belonging to a minority –people started to take pride in being different from the rest–, a distrust towards one’s neighbours and a desire to show off; in short, a true “community feeling” linked the people of Montbéliard.

In 1712, a census showed the following figures: by then, the population of the city included 2507 Lutherans, 44 Calvinists, 34 Anabaptists, and 59 Catholics. The people of Montbéliard who had accepted the Reformation resignedly, but without a fight, had become committed Protestants, proud of their difference.

This situation would become more and more pronounced in the course of the 18th century: in 1793, the county's population had reached 27,000 inhabitants, out of which only 500 (under 2%) were Catholic. After the return of Montbéliard to France, the mingling of populations quickly resulted in an increase of this percentage: in 1850, Catholics represented 10% of the overall Christian population, and by 1920, this number had gone up to 50%, to reach 85% today.





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