

# ASPECTS OF FRANCONIA

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## ***September 2018 – Wilhelmine of Prussia, Margravine of Brandenburg-Bayreuth (1709-1758)***

What a fascinating lady she was, Princess Wilhelmine of Prussia, granddaughter of George I of Great Britain, daughter of the Prussian “Soldier King” Friedrich Wilhelm I, and elder sister of Frederick the Great. Her mother had ambitious plans for her daughter, namely a marriage to Frederick Prince of Wales, the eldest son of George II, which would have one day made her Queen of England and drawn together Great Britain and Prussia. The plan, however, never reached fruition. Political intrigue and differences of opinion between the parents led ultimately to Wilhelmine being forced to marry Frederick, Margrave of Brandenburg-Bayreuth, and Britain’s loss was to be another’s gain.

When Wilhelmine's spouse came into his inheritance in 1735, the pair set about making Bayreuth a miniature Versailles. Their building projects included the rebuilding of their summer residence (now part of the State Hermitage Museum), the rebuilding of the great Bayreuth opera house, the building of a second, new opera house, the building of a theatre, and the reconstruction of the Bayreuth palace. The Margravine made Bayreuth one of the chief intellectual centres of the Holy Roman Empire, surrounding herself with a court of intellectuals and artists that accrued added prestige from the occasional visits of Voltaire and Frederick the Great.

In 1743  
husband founded  
Erlangen. One of  
Margravine’s  
which she  
university. It  
and wide-ranging  
matters relating to  
and includes her  
with her brother  
and Voltaire.



Wilhelmine and her  
the University of  
its treasures is the  
personal library  
donated to the  
reflects her curiosity  
interests in all  
the Enlightenment,  
correspondence  
Frederick the Great

Wilhelmine also left her mark on Erlangen’s Markgrafentheater, the oldest Baroque theatre in southern Germany still in use. She commissioned its Rococo redesign by the Venetian theatre architect Giovanni Paolo Gaspari in the years 1743/44.

“Fascinating” describes her well. Without her influence Bayreuth would later not have attracted Richard Wagner, the city would not have become a World Heritage Site, and Erlangen would have been far less interesting. Wilhelmine was indeed truly remarkable.

***Frank Gillard***